

“THE NAME ISN’T GOING TO CHANGE EVERYTHING, BUT IT’S GOING TO MAKE IT
BETTER”: GENDER INCLUSION IN TRADITIONALLY SINGLE-GENDER CHORAL
ENSEMBLES

By

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ABSTRACT

“THE NAME ISN’T GOING TO CHANGE EVERYTHING, BUT IT’S GOING TO MAKE IT BETTER”: GENDER INCLUSION IN TRADITIONALLY SINGLE-GENDER CHORAL ENSEMBLES

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The purpose of this dissertation was to tell the stories of conductors leading traditionally single-gender choral ensembles and how they considered practices and discourses surrounding gender and gender inclusion in ensembles historically defined by gender exclusion. In line with narrative inquiry, the research puzzles explored (1) how conductors’ intra- and interpersonal experiences with gender influenced the ways they saw and experienced gender, and (a) how those experiences influenced their choral pedagogy; (2) the discourses surrounding gender in traditionally single-gender choral ensembles, (a) how those discourses were created, and (b) who created the discourses; (3) practices the conductors employed to create environments honoring and valuing a variety of gender identities; and (4) the areas in which the conductors felt they succeeded in creating or struggled to create environments honoring and valuing a variety of gender identities.

The research design was emergent. Megan and Chris (pseudonyms)—two directors of women’s and men’s choirs, respectively, at public universities—and the singers of those ensembles co-constructed narratives surrounding gender inclusion in the choirs. Through a series of individual interviews and small-group and large-group discussions with the conductors and singers, five major themes emerged. First, both singers and conductors found the ensembles to be important spaces for meaning-making, and they problematized many of the values and challenges of choral ensembles defined by gender. Second, the conductors and singers addressed

a number of stereotypes and assumptions related to women's, treble, men's, and tenor-bass ensembles and interrogated assumptions about gender, particularly as it related to trans and gender-expansive singers. Third, they considered gender inclusion as it related to policies and practices such as uniforms, rehearsal language, and program logistics. Fourth, they stressed the importance of open communication between students and conductors, allowing for student agency and input, facilitating difficult conversations within choral ensembles, and centering the voices of trans and gender-expansive singers. Finally, allyship was a central theme to the project as singers and conductors reflected on privilege, inclusion and exclusion, and ensuring that allyship is actionable and not performative. At the end of the project, the women's choir singers and the conductor chose to move away from a gendered choral model. The conductor of the men's choir saw moving away from a gendered choral model as an essential part of creating a gender-inclusive ensemble, while the singers were hesitant to move away from a gendered choral model.

Based on the themes, a number of implications, considerations, and recommendations emerged as it related to choral policies and practices. Conductors and singers can implement more inclusive policies as it relates to language, literature selection and discussion, uniforms, voice classification, external image of the ensemble, and choral program hierarchies. Regardless of ensemble name and classification, conductors and singers need to acknowledge and problematize the impact of gender in choral ensembles. Future research related to gender must prioritize an intersectional approach and center the voices of trans and gender-expansive individuals.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

I have never felt an incongruence with my gender identity and the gender assigned to me. However, I have struggled with gender expression and often experienced frustrations about gendered expectations I felt were impressed upon me. The first way that I vividly recall experiencing gender was through social play. From an early age, I was always more interested in active games like sports than in dolls, but I was always the last pick for the soccer team. I quickly labeled myself as a “tomboy” in the hope that I would be accepted by my male peers as one of their own.

As I gravitated toward my male peers, it became apparent that there were social protocols linking my gender to appearance. At school, a girl told me that I couldn’t be a tomboy if I dressed like a girl. At church, the messages I heard about my body were clear: I should respect it as a temple, and it was my personal responsibility not to tempt my brothers in Christ. When low-rise jeans came into style, I struggled to keep my midriff covered to meet school and church dress codes, so I started exclusively shopping in the boys section. My sister and I went to the same school, and she was bullied under the assumption that I was a lesbian, an identity that was unheard of in our hometown in rural Oregon. I never quite felt comfortable in dresses for concerts out of fear that my peers might perceive my body as too feminine (read: sexual). Yet, I was uncomfortable performing in tuxedo shirts and cummerbunds because I was often mistaken for being a boy. I didn’t wear a dress of my own volition until my high school graduation, and even then, I was uncomfortable and kept it hidden under my fully-zipped graduation robe.

By the time I was in 5th grade, my relationship with gender became one that was not as outwardly noticeable such as clothing and appearance, but one centered on gender roles and expectations. In school, I was often the only female trumpet player in my ensemble. My band

directors relegated me to roles such as “keeping the boys in line” and assigning parts in ways to keep the boys from fighting, as opposed to tasks and positions that would challenge me musically. My choir teacher catered recruitment to male singers because they were in short supply, and we “needed” them to perform “top-tier” music. As a result, I felt devalued and wondered how many female singers would have benefited from that same level of focus.

As a young adult, I reflected on my own experiences with gender and began to compare and contrast them with the experiences of others. Four years ago, my sister-in-law came out to me as trans. Before coming out, she sang in a men’s ensemble at our university. She and I played trumpet together from our first symphonic band experience in 5th grade to our university’s marching band. What were the social expectations of her behavior as someone who played the trumpet—an instrument typically associated with masculinity? Did the male-centric literature of the men’s ensemble leave any space for exploring identities beyond the traditionally masculine? How did the single-uniform option—slacks, dress shirt, suit jacket, and a tie—influence her ability to express her gender both within and outside that space?

In contrast with my sister-in-law’s experience in a men’s choir, I found solace singing in a women’s choir. For years, I had sung in ensembles that embraced gendered stereotypes in literature and discourse. For the first time in my life, I was engaging with music that resonated with how I saw and experienced my own gender identity. This musical and social experience has been central to my individual and musical identity development. After several negative experiences in musical and non-musical mixed-gendered spaces in my K-12 and collegiate experiences, I had finally found a place to make music that valued me because of my gender, not in spite of it. Could someone like my sister-in-law—a trans woman—also find solace in a space

dedicated for women, or would it recreate the oppressions she continues to experience in other aspects of her life?

After college, I got my first job as a middle school choir teacher, where I continued to encounter gender and its intersections with music. I had several students who embraced living outside of gender norms—boys painting their nails, girls competing head-to-head with boys in athletics—but it wasn't until my fourth year of teaching that I taught an openly trans student. During spirit week, there was a Super Hero dress-up day. He wore the trans pride flag as a cape and painted his face with its colors: baby blue, pastel pink, and white. He always appeared confident and was well-loved by staff and peers, serving on the school leadership committee, helping with back-to-school night and orientation, and auditioned for all the school's musicals. As a 7th grader, he became increasingly aware of male classmates experiencing the adolescent voice change but was comforted to be surrounded by peers at various stages of vocal development. He excitedly shared with me that he had been approved to start "T" (testosterone hormone therapy) in the summer and was eager to explore his new voice in choir the following fall.

During parent-teacher conferences, I talked with his parents about my efforts to create an environment that acknowledged and embraced gender diversity: discussing gender in our text analysis, moving to an all-black uniform where students chose an outfit that best reflected their style and comfort, removing gendered language from choir names and voice parts, and recruiting students with a variety of identities into the choir program. When I asked if there were other things I should keep in mind as I taught their son, they paused and said, "We'll have to go home and think about it. We've never had a teacher ask us that before." I think of that

interaction often. How often had I assumed I was doing right by students without explicitly asking them about their needs?

The way I have experienced my gender has been influenced by varying identities and experiences: religion, time, region, professional and personal relationships, and the various musical spaces I have occupied. The discourses surrounding gender were vastly different in my rural, conservative hometown in the early 2000s compared to those I experienced as a teacher in the suburbs of a major metropolitan area. I have sung in choirs that made me feel valued because of my gender and others where I was valued despite it. As I continue to explore my identity as a cisgender woman, I have realized my gender identity does not exist in a vacuum, but is instead influenced by all of my identities.

As I interact with others and come to know their gender identities, I have become increasingly aware of intersecting identities I had not previously considered, such as race, political orientation, class, age, and ethnicity. Even though I have found comfort in women's spaces, those spaces have primarily been occupied by cisgender, middle-class, white women. My experiences in those spaces may differ vastly from those of a person who is Black, lesbian, nonbinary, or economically disadvantaged.

When discussing gender, Glasser and Smith (2008) contended that most people, in formal and informal settings, work under the premise that their audience has a shared understanding of the term *gender*. In seeking to establish a common ground of terminology, it becomes apparent that definitions of sex and gender are complex and vary depending on the given circumstance. Therefore, Glasser and Smith argued that conversations about sex and gender require clear definitions from the outset. Below, I discuss and define a variety of terms and legislation to create a common vocabulary that I use throughout my dissertation.

Background and Definitions

Essentialism, Constructionism, and Gender Identity

In determining the relationship between sex and gender, individuals typically characterize the nature of single-gender spaces—spaces segregated by gender—through an *essentialist* or *constructionist* perspective. An essentialist view looks at gender as “stable, unchanging, fixed at birth, and due to biological differences rather than environmental factors” (Smiler & Gelman, 2008, p. 864). As a result, essentialists believe gender exists as a binary, with one option being “male” and the other “female” (Gülgöz, DeMeules, Gelman, & Olson, 2019). Under the presumption that sex and gender are inextricably linked, both are determined at birth based on external sex organs (Westbrook & Schilt, 2014). Conversely, constructionists view gender as something constructed through social interactions and behavioral and visual cues (Bohan, 1993). This belief creates a framework where gender exists on a spectrum, and *gender identity* is determined individually based on “how one experiences their gender in their own body and in their own context” (Palkki, 2016, p. 8). Traditionally, doctors have determined sex based on genitalia alone (Westbrook & Schilt, 2014). Still, psychologists and doctors stress that factors contributing to sex also include hormones, gonads, brain anatomy, brain function, and chromosomes and that none of these can explicitly determine someone’s sex (Heath & Wynne, 2019).

Gender and Single-Gender Spaces in the Law

Although the definitions of “sex” and “gender” are contested, legal scholars traditionally have used *sex* when talking about biological distinctions (generally genitalia) while using *gender* to denote “the attributes society generally associates with biologically different sexes” (Cohen, 2011 p. 56). From a legal standpoint, the law typically segregates spaces based on sex, not

gender. For example, the Selective Service program (also known as “the draft”) requires all male citizens and residents of the United States to register. The implication of the law is not that people with “masculine qualities” (i.e., gender) register, but people who have been determined to be male based on genitalia (i.e., sex).

Two federal laws address sex segregation and discrimination: Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Title IX of the Education Amendments Act of 1972. These laws provide protections on the basis of sex in the workplace and federally-funded schools, respectively. In the past twenty years, a number of gender issues have been addressed through state and federal policies and laws, including cases in the Supreme Court. Some of these issues have concerned the rights of trans individuals to bathrooms that align with their gender identity, employment rights of trans individuals, and widening Title IX exceptions for sex-segregated classrooms (Cohen, 2011) I examine these further in Chapter 2.

Sex Segregation, Single-Gender Spaces, and Determining Gender

Cohen (2011) defined *sex segregation* as the “laws, rules, or policies that require complete separation of men and women, or that completely exclude either men or women from participating in an activity” (pp. 57-58). Even though sex segregation is a trending topic of discussion—from bathrooms and locker rooms to lounges and sports—Carter (2018) pointed out that segregating on the basis of sex has occurred throughout history. To segregate by sex, people typically go through a process Westbrook & Schilt (2014) call *determining gender*. When first meeting an unfamiliar person, people generally determine gender based on how well the other person “performs” or “does” their gender. Traditionally, society has determined both gender and sex by biological factors, but since the 1960s, there has been a shift toward determining gender

on the basis of an individual's gender identity, particularly in nonsexual places such as the workplace (Schilt, 2010).

Cohen (2011) differentiated between sex segregation and *de facto segregation*. In *de facto* segregation, individuals unconsciously segregate spaces by social pressures related to gender norms (such as a drumline only having male percussionists). Cohen further delineated sex segregation into four categories: mandatory (required by law, such as public restrooms); administrative (utilized by the government without legal compulsions, such as government-funded research specific to women's health); permissive (instances where sex segregation is legally sanctioned but not mandated, such as fraternities and sororities); and voluntary (implemented by groups outside the government without express legal permission, such as mothers' support groups).

Although Cohen (2011) outlined how most legal instances of segregation are centered around sex and not gender, in this dissertation, I will refer to spaces segregated by sex or gender as "single-gender" and "gender-segregated." This distinction allowed me to examine both legally and socially determined segregation while acknowledging that both essentialists and constructionists recognize gender factoring into the way these spaces are determined. The difference lies in the criteria for segregating these spaces.

Gender in Music Education

For decades, music education scholars have considered where gender and music intersect (Abeles & Porter, 1978; Gould, 1992, 2004, 2009, 2016; Green, 1993, 1997; Koza, 1992, 1993, 1993-1994; Lamb, 1994, 1996; O'Toole, 1994, 1998). In recent years, there has been an increased and varied interest in gender scholarship within the field (Bartolome, 2013, 2016; Elorriaga, 2011; Freer, 2016, 2018; McBride & Palkki, 2020; Nichols, 2013; Palkki, 2015, 2017,

2020; Palkki & Sauerland, 2019; Parker, 2018; Silveira & Goff, Sweet, 2015, 2016, 2018). There is a wide body of research considering the influence of gender on instrument choice (Conway, 2000; Eros, 2008; Gathen, 2014; Kelly & VanWeelden, 2014; Wych, 2012). Over the past ten years, scholars have delved deeper into how gender impacts choral music education, ranging from topics such as the adolescent voice change (Freer, 2016; Gackle, 2011, Sweet, 2015, 2016, 2018), explorations of single-gender ensembles (Bartolome, 2013; Elorriaga, 2011; Parker, 2018; Ramsey, 2013; Sweet, 2010; Wilson, 2013), and trans singers (Cates, 2019; Palkki, 2015, 2017, 2020; Palkki & Caldwell, 2018; Sauerland, 2018). In Chapter 2, I conduct a thorough literature review of gender issues in music education.

Single-Gender Choirs

Single-gender choirs, which fall into the category of voluntary segregation, are a source of debate within the music education community in the United States. Although some have noted the benefits of men's choirs on the vocal and identity development of its members (Elorriaga, 2011; Freer, 2009a, 2009b; Ramsey, 2013), scholars such as Ashley (2010) have argued that single-gender choirs may do more harm than good in terms of musical and gender identity development. Gauthier (2005), O'Toole (1998), and Wilson (2013) all noted that women's choirs are typically viewed as being less prestigious or desirable compared to all-male and mixed ensembles. Conversely, Bartolome (2013) and Parker (2018) documented how female singers experienced increased confidence and feelings of self-worth as a result of their involvement in a women's choir.

Palkki (2016) highlighted the issues surrounding single-gender ensembles with regards to trans individuals. Trans women, for example, may not feel comfortable or welcome in a women's choir depending on their voice type or the discourse surrounding the ensemble, and

nonbinary people may wonder if they are permitted to join an ensemble classified by gender if they do not identify with one or any gender. Palkki noted that a number of state honor choirs had moved their choir classification from one based on gender to one based on voice part (i.e., “Treble” or “Tenor-Bass” ensembles). Like Palkki (2015), I advocate for conductors to seriously consider the trend of ensembles segregated by gender and its implications for trans, gender-expansive, and cisgender musicians. Although some conductors may embrace the gendered identity of the ensemble and its membership, others may decide it is necessary to rename and reclassify their choirs in ways other than gender.

Single-Gender Spaces: A Dilemma

The purpose and existence of single-gender spaces have a history of ebb and flow. Orchestras, which weren't legally segregated, created a system in which they became voluntarily segregated by design. In response, women created orchestras of their own not to exclude men, but to have a space to prove their worth. Once the orchestras saw they were meeting their goal, they were mostly disbanded (Tick, 1986; Neuls-Bates, 1986, 1996). Although a few men's (Garcia, 2019) and women's (Caplan-Bricker, 2019) colleges remain in the United States, most have dissolved as co-educational settings have become the new norm (Smothers, 2005; Woodhouse, 2015; Yarrow, 1986).

Choirs continue to wrestle with the purpose of single-gender spaces. Across the country, honor choirs have moved away from men's and women's choirs and now have “Treble” and “Tenor-Bass Choirs,” choosing instead to define themselves by voice type rather than gender (Palkki, 2016). Although some groups have moved away from using gender as an ensemble identifier, others have noted the benefits of single-gender ensembles (Bartolome, 2013; Elorriaga, 2011; Freer, 2009a, 2009b; Parker, 2018; Ramsey, 2013).

There continue to be women's choirs who have claimed spaces dedicated to women and their experiences, acting as a refuge and a space of empowerment. Some have gotten rid of the word "women" but have replaced it with feminine names such as "Bella Voce." Even though these names are not explicitly exclusionary to people who don't identify as women, the implication is that the space is one occupied by women. The same trends happen in men's choirs, with some abandoning masculine names and repertoire, while others embrace it as a means for recruitment.

As music educators have wrestled with evolving concepts of sex and gender, they have debated about whether single-gender choirs should exist. In reflecting on women's softball leagues, Travers (2006) noted, "The protection of traditional women-only space and the softening of the gender binary to be more trans-inclusive need not be mutually inclusive" (p. 444). The experience of cisgender women and trans individuals need not be at odds with one another. Rather than seeing these goals as conflicting, diversity of purpose and experiences can expand and enrich these spaces in ways that would otherwise not be possible.

My Positionality

In 2019, a classmate and I approached the conductor of the women's choir in which we sang about the name of our ensemble and issues surrounding inclusion. A nonbinary student told us about their struggles as someone who did not identify as male or female in the music department. For example, they did not know if they would be permitted to participate in the women's ensemble. We agreed to talk with members of the ensemble individually and as a group in the form of education, group discussions, and a space for the students to individually talk about what the ensemble meant to them.

As I talked with members of the ensemble, it became apparent that the place was valuable to them not only as musicians but as women. Singers said the ensemble made them “safe” and “empowered,” that they felt ease being out of the “male gaze” for a small portion of their day, and that they valued the experiences and identity shared throughout the group. When I began the project, I felt the obvious solution was to remove the gendered nature of the ensemble name. As I heard their stories, though, their experiences resonated with my own. These women worried that by removing the gendered nature of the ensemble, cisgender men would join the ensemble. They feared losing a space that held so much personal meaning.

Others saw the ensemble as one based on voice part—Sopranos and Altos—and that all singers that could successfully sing and blend in the treble range should be allowed to join. One singer pressed that female singers who had experienced abuse at the hands of men should be allowed to have spaces where men are not permitted. She argued that since our university offers a men’s chorus, our ensemble did not need to consider admitting cisgender or transgender men. We talked about starting a task force of interested students to look at a variety of things—the course description, syllabus, ensemble biography, and the name of the ensemble—to ensure that we were inclusive not just in name but in policy. When I try to decide what I would do as a conductor, I now accept that my opinion continue to change. At the onset of the previous women’s choir project, I felt particularly unsettled and did not know the best path forward. It was with the unsettled feeling that I began this project.

Theoretical Lenses

As a cisgender woman, I approach this dissertation with the desire to consider a variety of perspectives. Although some may believe feminist theory is a means for exploring various gender and sexual identities, the very existence of queer and transgender theory speaks to the

need for scholars to center queer and voices and experiences. As such, I explore feminist, queer, and transgender theory; where the theories overlap and diverge; and how each of the theories will inform the framework of my dissertation.

Feminism

Feminism as a term is relatively new. First coined in the 1880s, *féminisme*—from the French *femme* (meaning “woman”) and *-isme* (implying a social movement)—came about when political theories such as socialism and communism were spreading across the Western world. In the United States, the “woman movement”—now referred to as first-wave feminism—initially centered on education and property rights. By the early 1900s, it shifted its focus to equal rights with men, particularly in the form of women’s right to vote and an equal-rights amendment to the constitution that would guarantee federal protections on the basis of sex (Freedman, 2002).

In the 1960s, “women’s liberation” and its followers (“women libbers”) demanded not only equality with men across various sectors of society but also an identity independent from men. Part of the call for equality was related to reproductive and sexual rights. During this period, the term *gender* began to denote the belief that gender/sex roles were socially constructed for both men and women and that it was different from *sex*, which focused on biological distinctions. As time went on, women’s liberation—the second wave of feminism—was equated with *feminism* (Freedman, 2002). Feminism has since broadened its horizons to be a movement advocating for increased individual freedom (hooks, 2000, p. 25) and focuses on women’s empowerment, humanist ideals (Radford-Hill, 2000), and ending sexist oppression. All of these things, feminists argue, can be achieved by challenging systems of power and oppression present throughout society (hooks, 2000; Stark, 2017).

Radford-Hill (2000) defined feminism as a means for recognizing gender “both as a social construct and as a corporeal reality, in the reaction of human thought, in the interpretation of human history, and the struggle for social justice” (p. 2). By focusing on gender as a social construct, it recognizes the gender hierarchy that exists within society and highlights the impact it has on our daily lives. In turn, this recognizes the characteristics and values attached to that hierarchy and empowers feminists to challenge them (Crenshaw, 1991; Misra, 2018). Feminist scholars such as Radford-Hill and Butler fall into the camp of gender constructionists, theorizing that gender is not innate, but performative and that an identity such as woman “is produced and restrained by the very structures of power through which emancipation is sought” (Butler, 1990, p. 2).

As a lens, feminism “provides a means to analyze constructions of meaning and relationships of power that call singular-all-encompassing categories into question” (O’Toole, 1994, p. 8). Gould (2011) asserted that feminism is a lens through which music educators can problematize issues related to gender. The application of feminism involves examining not only what is known, but also:

...what has been omitted, devalued, discarded, focusing in particular on genealogies of ontological and epistemological issues, social institutions, and their unspoken assumptions. (p. 138)

Scholars who utilize a feminist lens question what has been determined to be “natural” or “common sense,” such as gender roles and norms, and in turn “deconstruct power relations” (O’Toole, 1994, p. 7). For example, O’Toole frequently used feminist approaches to examine the traditional structures of music programs and to challenge hierarchies present within choirs and choir programs (1994, 1998).

Because of feminism's origins in social movements, feminism as a lens is often directly tied to engaging in social justice. Curtis (2012), a feminist music therapist, highlighted the responsibilities of therapists who apply a feminist lens to their profession:

...they must work to heal the harm created for individuals by an unjust society, and at the same time they must also work to transform that society. ... They address issues of power and oppression with their clients—in their personal lives and in the broader community; but feminist music therapists must also address these issues in their own lives—both personal and professional. While feminist music therapy can be practiced by women or men, it can only be practiced by feminists and activists. (p. 211)

A feminist lens, therefore, is not only applied in a theoretical way to the lives of others, but it is often utilized as a means for feminists to translate their personal experiences “from the private sphere to the political sphere” and “[become] advocates for themselves and ultimately for others” (Curtis, 2012, p. 212). In music education, scholars have applied feminist lenses to contextualize their own experiences (Gould, 1994), trouble power dynamics (Gould, 2007; O’Toole, 1994, 1998) and gender norms (Koza, 1993, 1993-1994), and provide solutions directly related to social justice outcomes (O’Toole, 1998; Palkki, 2016).

Critiques of Feminism

Although some scholars use feminism as a means for examining trans and queer issues with a constructionist perspective (Elliot, 2009; Gould, 2004, 2011; Heyes, 2003; Palkki, 2016), there are others who see gender through an essentialist lens. Transphobic feminist texts such as Hausman's (1995) *Changing Sex: Transsexualism, Technology, and the Idea of Gender* and Raymond's (1979) *The Transsexual Empire: The Making of the She-Male* paint people who are

trans as mentally ill. Heyes (2003) contended that such a critique goes against the feminist value of making space for people who are marginalized.

Essentialism is not unique to feminism nor theories concerning gender, but it is a major criticism of feminism held by the public and academy alike. By presuming the shared experience of all women, feminist leaders—particularly in the second wave—fought for causes that are specific to the needs of white, middle-class women. As a result, feminism’s central tenets often do not consider people who are poor or women of color (hooks, 2000; Lorde, 1984; Mohanty, 2003; Radford-Hill, 2000).

Even though feminists claim ending sexist oppression is central to their cause, some critique feminism as a means for decentering and excluding men from discussions of cisheteronormativity (Walters, 2005).¹ Although men do not experience sexism in the same ways as women, they certainly are not free from the consequences of rigid gender norms (hooks, 2000). Koza (1993-1994) analyzed the content of various choral methods texts and found, among other things, that the discourse in these texts is both misogynistic and homophobic. McBride and Palkki (2020) recreated Koza’s (1993-1994) study and found that while there has been a shift away from gendered stereotypes in music education since 2016, coded language concerning misogyny and homophobia is still present in choral methods textbooks and articles.

Despite women historically banding together in the fight against gender discrimination (Stark, 2017), hooks (2000) argued that middle-class white women, who are often leaders in the social movements, purposefully do not include men in feminist dialogue. Doing so would highlight that not all men experience the same privileges of the patriarchy because of inequalities they experience related to race, class, sexuality, religion, and ability. Addressing how men

¹ Cisheteronormativity is “a pervasive system of belief that centers and naturalizes heterosexuality and a binary system of assigned sex/gender” (The Gender and Sexuality Campus Center, n.d.).

experience sexism, therefore, would require feminists to examine issues beyond sexism and recognize the racism and classism that are rampant throughout the movement.

Queer Theory

A group of Lesbian and Gay Studies scholars highlighted the apparent lack of attention to sexuality in feminist thought. In response, they formed their own theory, *queer theory*, as a direct response to and outgrowth of feminism. In the 1980s, there was a rise in poststructural thought as activists challenged socially constructed identities and the way they give power to a select few while marginalizing others (Radford-Hill, 2000). In poststructural fashion, queer theorists claimed that feminism focused too much on the identity of the feminist movement and not enough on deconstructing the very labels that are used to oppress them (Namaste, 2000; Walters, 2005). First coined by de Lauretis (1991), queer theory and the term “queer” are intentionally broad (Walters, 2005) to “open up a space for different minority sexualities and genders to be present who have commonly experienced marginality” (Pitt-Brooke & Janmohamed, 2018, p. 175). Because the word “queer” itself is not specific to gender—unlike terms such as “gay” and “lesbian”—it serves the queer theory principle that gender and sexuality are not inextricably linked (Walters, 2005) and that gender exists on a continuum rather than a binary (Butler, 1993).

Like feminism, queer theory focuses on oppression as linked to multiple sites of identity and troubles what has been accepted as normal and status quo (Dilley, 1999). Central to a queer theoretical framework is the *queering*, or “[making] the familiar strange, and the strange familiar without necessitating a process of ‘othering’” (Bergonzi et al., 2016, p. 14). Abramo (2011) and Shane (2020) both queered music classrooms to examine the intersections of music, gender, and sexuality, and how they influence one another.

When educators engage in queering music education discourse, the goal should not be inclusion, as if inclusion “is synonymous with equality and freedom” (Warner, 1993, p. xix, as cited in Gould, 2010-11). To the contrary, an application of queer theory should not seek to fit queer discourses into preconceived heteronormative molds, but rather question and disrupt the very existence and purpose of a heteronormative music pedagogy. A queer theoretical lens in gender research does not seek to achieve “assimilation” (Gould, 2016), but rather trouble the idea of assimilating in relation to a norm. A queer theoretical approach to gender issues in music education, therefore, would problematize the gendered nature of choral ensembles and consider new ways to conceptualize choir.

Critiques of Queer Theory

Some criticize the use of “queer” within queer theory, saying it implies that a specific sexuality is required (specifically one that is not heterosexual) when it should symbolize a critique of such provisions (Namaste, 2005; Elliot, 2009). Even de Lauretis (1991), who coined the term “queer,” spoke in binary with relation to sexuality, referring to “gay” and “lesbian” without acknowledging other sexualities. Others have said that since queer theory claims to be “beyond gender,” it doesn’t address the experiences of cisgender women who do not conform to traditional gender norms (Walters, 2005, p. 13). As a result, the dialogue surrounding queer theory lends itself to the gay male experience and not only minimizes lesbians’ place in queer theory but also the important role lesbians have played in gender politics.

Both queer theory and feminism have been accused of tokenizing people who are gender-diverse. By discussing their place in society only as a means for problematizing gender, they fail to develop a deeper understanding of trans lived experiences or fighting for trans rights (Elliot, 2009; Namaste, 2000). In a critique of Butler (1990) and Garber (1992), Namaste (2000)

prioritized giving voice to trans culture and experience to show that it is not a one-size-fits-all label, but one that is rich with diversity. Additionally, many people within the transgender community “do not make sense of their lives in lesbian/gay terms” (Namaste, 2005, p. 4), which makes the common understanding of “queer” within queer theory another identity point that leaves many out of the picture. As a result of these criticisms, scholars broke off once more and formed a new theory specific to the experiences of people who are gender variant (Nagoshi et al., 2017).

Transgender Theory

Transgender theory, like queer theory, embraces a variety of identities, specifically those which are gender diverse. Roen (2001, 2002) argued that feminist and queer theories often embrace an “either/or” (for example, male or female) mentality about gender, particularly in relation to transgender individuals, when in reality, transgender identity should be viewed as “both/neither,” allowing room for identities to grow, fluctuate, and change. Transgender identity need not be centered on a single identity, but multiple identities, or at times, none at all (such as nonbinary). As such, transgender theory focuses its analysis of transgender discourse on 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 experience. (Nagoshi & Brzuzy, 2010, p. 432).

Feminist and queer theories have been applied more broadly to identities outside of cisgender and non-heteronormative individuals, and some scholars have specifically applied transgender theory to the analysis of transgender experience (Nagoshi & Brzuzy, 2010; Nagoshi et al., 2014; Roen, 2001, 2002). Because transgender theory is so centered on individual experience, scholars

who apply transgender theory to their work typically focus less on theorizing and more on creating tangible change in the lives of their participants (Nagoshi et al, 2014).

Although feminist and queer theorists tend to describe gender as a binary or a continuum, Heath & Wynne (2019) conceptualized gender as a sphere that encompasses a variety of points. At any given time, those within that sphere are *migrating* (permanently transitioning from one end of the gender binary to the other), *oscillating* (moving between gender identities), *negating* (abandoning the gender binary altogether), or *transcending* (embracing a potentially limitless number of gender identities). Central to transgender theory is the belief that “gender contains a rich tapestry of possibilities and every one of these is to be valued” (Heath & Wynne, 2019, p. 46).

Heath and Wynne’s “rich tapestry” of gender identity includes both trans individuals who are openly gender variant and those who seek to “pass” as cisgender women or men. Roen (2002) noted that transgender individuals who chose not to be open about their trans identity had been criticized as being “closeted” or having “false consciousness” (p. 521). These critics argue that those who choose not to reveal their assigned birth sex are conforming to standards held up by the gender binary. Bornstein (1994) went as far as to say those who seek a life of stealth (another term for “passing”) “[represent] shame, capitulation, invisibility, lies, and self-denial” (Heath & Wynne, 2019, p. 189). Other critics have accused individuals falling in the categories of *oscillating* or *negating* as “flighty” (Kinsman, 2007, p. 71) or “dilettantes and recreationalists in the game of gender” (Halberstam, 1998a, p. 167). These criticisms do not consider that for a number of trans individuals, disclosing their gender identity could result in loss of home and/or work, or lead to death (Human Rights Campaign Foundation, 2018). In the United States alone, at least 28 transgender individuals were murdered as of August 27, 2020 (National Center for

Transgender Equality, 2020). In a time when the United States is experiencing a “national pandemic” (Human Rights Campaign Foundation, 2018) of violent transphobia, these accusations act counter one of the primary tenets of transgender theory: acknowledging both lived and embodied experience as central to the lives of trans individuals.

Like feminist and queer theories, transgender theory further complicates the relationship between gender and sex. Sex has traditionally been attributed to specific hormones, chromosomes, and external genitalia—estrogen, XX, and vaginas for females and testosterone, XY, and penises for males—but “any attempt to capture all the aspects of sex and gender would have to include biological sex, legal sex, affirmed sex, sexual orientation, social behavior, outward presentation, and preferred sexual activity” (Heath & Wynne, 2019, p. 26). Although XX is associated with women and XY with men, there are exceptions, with documented cases of people assigned female at birth having a male genotype (XY), and vice versa for men. This is also true for many other genotypes.

The label “transgender,” along with sexuality deviating from heterosexuality, has historically been pathologized. For those seeking to have their sex marker legally changed, begin hormone therapy, or undergo a sex/gender reassignment surgery (a common prerequisite for obtaining a legal sex change), they must be diagnosed with *gender dysphoria* (originally referred to as *gender identity disorder*) (Nagoshi & Nagoshi, 2017). As a label, gender dysphoria works under the presumption that trans identity is a result of mental illness. However, scholars argue trans individuals experience stress and anxiety not because of mental illness but from prolonged social rejection (Heath & Wynne, 2019; Nagoshi et al., 2017).

As such, social workers and trans activists seek to remove gender dysphoria as a diagnosis in the American Psychiatric Association’s Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental

Disorders (currently known as *DSM-5* to denote its 5th and most recent edition) and as a prerequisite for gender-affirming medical care (Heath & Wynne, 2019). In its place, they advocate for the International Classification of Disease's new term *gender incongruence*, which "doesn't imply any accompanying mental ill-health" (Heath & Wynne, 2019, p. 2010). Nagoshi & Brzuzy (2010) implored social workers to remind trans people that their distress regarding gender is not related to an inherent mental illness but rather the prolonged stress experienced from the expectation to "conform to society's gender-binary norms" (p. 438). Heath and Wynne (2019) believed that "when those seeking medical interventions do not have to be diagnosed as mentally ill, we will know that society wants trans people to enjoy the same privileges and rights as everybody else" (p. 10). Alternatively, when a transgender identity is no longer viewed as a mental illness, we will know that society has expanded its understanding of gender beyond essentialism and has embraced identity as something that is fluid and ever-changing in relation to individual experience.

Cisgender Scholars Engaged in Transgender Scholarship

There is a promising trend of transgender theorists engaging with and writing about transgender theory, much of the literature concerning the transgender experience is written by cisgender individuals who, "no matter how well-intended, are each trying to figure out how to make us [transgender people] fit into *their* world view" (Bornstein, 1994). Elliot (2009) highlighted a concerning trend among transgender theorists implying that those who live openly as trans individuals are dedicated to "the cause," and those aspiring to a life of stealth are not as committed. Elliot went on to criticize transgender theorists who claim their take on gender is "politically superior, more radical and more progressive" (p. 12) without taking the varied experiences of gender-variant individuals into account.

Although scholars view transgender theory as being relatively new among these theories exploring gender, Chaudhry (2019) was quick to highlight that the study of transgender issues is not new: “Trans studies have always been there, often lurking in the theoretical shadows, with little attention or resources to back up its importance” (p. 49) Amid the ongoing debate about whether cisgender individuals should study transgender issues (Wilchins, 1997; Serano, 2007), Liljeström (2020) and Chaudhry (2019) advocated for queer studies to “take the lead” from transgender theorists in their approach to trans issues.

Intersectionality

Coined by Crenshaw (1989), intersectionality was a response to feminism and its narrowly defined goals and experiences. In contrast, intersectionality challenges the idea of shared experience, questions the notion of stable identity rejects essentialist thought, examines systems of power, and is centered on action (Misra, 2018). Intersectionality allows individuals and groups to identify which identities and experiences are shared, which ones are not, and to embrace the difference (Crenshaw, 1991). It is essential in examining how things such as race, ethnicity, nationality, sexuality, religion, citizenship, and beyond interact, inform one another, and shape individual experience (Misra, 2018).

Because intersectionality rejects universals, it generates the means for critiquing systems that live in universals, such as gender identity or sexuality, and creates room for variance and difference (Misra, 2018). hooks (2000) saw this approach as an opportunity to bring in men and examine how sexism has impacted their lives, as well. It creates space for women of color to have experiences shared with both their male counterparts and women who are white.

Although the notion of intersectionality was first named by a Black feminist scholar, the concept is one that can be applied beyond race or cisgender identity. By utilizing an

intersectional approach, supporters of feminist, queer, and transgender theories can highlight the similarities and differences within and between their groups, value the diverse lived experiences of its supporters, and shift away from an “us versus them” mentality and one that is geared toward action and change (hooks, 2000).

Embracing the Unsettled

Collins (2012) acknowledged that it is often easier, more comfortable, and tempting to surround ourselves with people who affirm our identity, experiences, and beliefs. Collins challenged people to build relationships and coalitions with people from a variety of backgrounds and identities. In doing so, one can avoid the fallacies of a universal experience or that there is a single solution that meets everyone’s needs. Living in a world of *confirmation bias*—gravitating toward information consistent with one’s personal beliefs (Traut-Mattaush et al., 2011)—is easy, but it does not foster growth:

While it has been tempting to simplify my situated standpoints and merge them into a homogeneous narrative to make the world more comfortable for me, my challenge has been to sustain a commitment to dialogical knowledge production, especially in situations of conflict. Stated differently, I consistently seek out connections among entities that seem disparate, resisting the temptation to prematurely synthesize things to a tidy story, yet also recognizing that a story needs to be told. (Collins, 2012, p. 15)

Many people come into theory with preconceived notions of who they are and what we stand for. For example, given the bad press of the second wave of feminism, queer theory can perpetuate false reports of second-wave feminism, ignore the importance of that movement in creating their own, and ignore the vital role lesbians played in creating federal protections on the basis of gender (Walters, 2005, pp. 12-13). For those struggling with supporting movements such as

feminism, queer theory, or trans theory, hooks (2000) advocated for switching from an identity mindset (“I am a feminist”) to one centered on allyship (“I advocate for feminism, queer rights, and trans rights”). This mindset “does not engage us in the either/or dualistic thinking that is the central ideological component of all systems of domination in Western society. It implies that a choice has been made, that commitment to feminism is an act of will. It does not suggest that by committing oneself to feminism, the possibility of supporting other political movements is negated.” (hooks, 2000, p. 31).

Combining Theory

Central to feminist, queer, and transgender theories are the dedication to examining systems of power and oppression and engaging in activism. Bullington and Swarr (2007) noted that feminist and trans scholars are often pitted against one another in terms of who is most minoritized, when these communities could join together to fight against a shared heteropatriarchal oppression pervasive throughout society. Each of these theories represents the experiences and interests of different minoritized populations: women, queer individuals, and transgender people. Like Curtis (2012), my lived experience is one framed by feminism. In examining complex issues of gender, I sought to queer my perspective as a cisgender, white woman by engaging in discourses that varied from my own experience, particularly through the use of queer and transgender theories.

Given the pervasive and longstanding nature of feminist discourse in the United States and in music education research, I suspected and confirmed that participants approached this study from a feminist perspective. Because this dissertation explores the practices conductors employ to create environments honoring and valuing a variety of gender identities, I used feminism as a lens through which I examined the background of the participants, how “personal

interest in activism moves into [their] personal work” (Curtis, 2012, p. 210), and how they seek to be “advocates for themselves and ultimately for others” (Curtis, 2012, p. 2010), particularly as it is related to social justice.

I used queer theory to examine the intertwined nature of gender and sexuality, all while queering what the participants consider to be normative and moving it from the familiar to the strange (Bergonzi et al., 2016; Gould, 2009). Even though O’Toole (1998) examined choral hierarchies through a feminist lens, queering systems of power in ensemble structures “gives opportunity to uncover new spaces for liberation and transformation” (Bergonzi et al., 2016, p. 14) in ways that I and the participants had not previously considered to be possible.

Researchers can easily apply transgender theory as a form of analysis in narrative approach to research (see Chapter 3) because of its focus on the individual, particularly in relation to how lived experience influences the embodiment of gender. Just as applying transgender theory creates space for transgender individuals’ identities to evolve and change, applying transgender theory to this dissertation encouraged the participants to see the experience as something that continues to develop as the conductors and ensemble members embody their individual experiences within the ensemble, rather than one than an experience that ended at the conclusion of the study. Conversations about gender in the ensemble are not static. The discourse of gender in traditionally single-gender ensembles is continuously evolving.

By utilizing an intersectional approach, I acknowledged that gender is central to this narrative, but there are other identities to consider, such as class, race, and sexuality. Each of these identities played a part in how the participants saw the world, and the varied identities all contributed to my understanding of their lived experiences. Because of my experiences, I saw these theories as a means of identifying that privilege, examining it, and challenging it so I could

grow and make room for voices who otherwise have not been heard. It also allowed room for participants to have varied views without presuming their opinions and positionality.

Single-Gender Spaces: Rooted in Tradition, Uprooted by Change

There is an ever-growing body of research considering gender in music education, suggesting increased interest and concern for examining the intersections of gender and music. This is particularly true for choral ensembles, which are gendered by historical practice. Although single-gender ensembles have been praised for their ability to build community and empower singers to embrace non-traditional gender norms (Bartolome, 2013; Freer, 2009a, 2009b; Parker, 2018; Ramsey, 2013), scholars have also noted the harm they can cause to students' self-esteem and social status (Dame, 2011, 2019; O'Toole, 1998).

As conductors (re)examine the makeup of their ensembles, this dissertation seeks to highlight what, at times, feels like an unavoidable conflict between the tradition of single-gender ensembles and a society with expanding conceptions of gender. By highlighting the experiences of conductors of traditionally single-gender ensembles, how they considered gender in their lives and profession, the inclusive policies they implemented, and where they struggled to find balance between inclusion and tradition, I sought to create spaces for a continued discourse that queers tradition, creating space for “both” tradition “and” change, and moves participants and audience members to action centered in social justice. Just as the lived experiences of trans, cisgender, and queer individuals are not the same, the experiences of the participants, myself, the audience, and the ensembles with which we engage will invariably differ. The goal of this dissertation is not to create a singular solution. As I utilize multiple frameworks examining systems of power and oppression while engaging in activism, my goal is that this study will join

participants, research, and audience in a common goal of dismantling sexist, homophobic, and transphobic oppression in the field of music education.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I start by examining gender in the United States from a legal standpoint and consider how gender plays out socially. I then delve into gender research in music (education) and how scholars have considered topics such as social justice and inclusion in music education. I end by identifying a gap in the research and the need for my dissertation.

Gender-Segregated Spaces in the United States

In the United States, gender segregation takes a variety of forms: clubs, sports, boy/girl scouts, locker rooms, golf courses, gym memberships, the Oscars, summer camps, and even informal social gatherings such as “guys’ night out,” bachelorette parties, and children’s sleepovers (Cohen, 2011). As people have considered the relationship between sex and gender, particularly since the 1960s (Schilt, 2010), the purpose of single-gender spaces has also been affirmed and contested in a variety of ways.

Gender and the Law

Legally-Sanctioned Sex Segregation

Although there are federal laws protecting workers and students on the basis of sex, there are a number of exceptions in which sex segregation is permissible. Under Title VII, sex segregation is permissible when sex is “a bona fide occupational qualification reasonably necessary to the normal operation of that particular business or enterprise” (Cohen, 2011, p. 88). Title IX, however, permits sex segregation in schools in a variety of ways. These circumstances include military schools, father/son and mother/daughter activities, beauty pageant scholarships, fraternities and sororities, and sports (Cohen, 2011). In 2001, No Child Left Behind included language that widened these exceptions to include sex-segregated classrooms “provided that the goal was educational diversity or to meet students’ particular needs” (Cohen, 2011, p. 65).

Title VII and Title IX

In recent years, issues related to Title VII and Title IX have begun to include trans identities. In 2016, the Department of Justice and Department of Education detailed the Obama Administration's interpretation of Title IX in the form of a "Dear Colleague" letter.² Though not legally binding, the letter impressed that "[a] school may provide separate facilities on the basis of sex, but must allow trans students access to such facilities consistent with their gender identity" (Lhamon & Gupta, 2016, p. 3), which included restrooms and locker rooms.

Since the Obama administration's "Dear Colleague" letter, trans issues continue to be a topic of tension at the federal level. In 2017, Trump Administration rescinded the guidelines outlined by the Obama administration, arguing that states should individually determine guidelines for trans students and bathrooms (Hersher & Johnson, 2017). Without federal protections, however, trans students are not guaranteed civil rights and equal access to public schooling. As a result, they are subjected to the policies or lack thereof put in place by local officials, which can vary greatly between schools, districts, and across their state.

Under the Trump Administration, gender issues continued to be in flux. In 2011, the Department of Education addressed sexual assault in higher education, saying that universities and colleges must address and end sexual harassment and assault on their campuses or risk losing federal funding (Ali, 2011). In 2017, the U.S. Department of Education Secretary Betsy DeVos rescinded the letter (Rosenblatt, 2020). In 2020, she released guidelines that required victims to provide more evidence before their assaulters can be convicted (Anderson, 2020).

² "Dear Colleague" letters are distributed by federal agencies (such as the Department of Education) that contain guidelines for how the federal agency interprets existing laws (such as Title VII and Title IX). (Kamenetz & Turner, 2017).

In 2020, a number of Title VII cases were addressed both inside and outside the courts. In three separate cases consolidated into one oral argument, the Supreme Court interpreted that Title VII's workplace protections on the basis of sex applied to the rights of LGBT individuals (*Bockston v. Clayton County*, 2020). Even though the dissenting opinion from the court argued that LGBT individuals were not protected given the original definition of sex at the time of Title VII's inception, Justice Gorsuch wrote the majority opinion, stating that employers discriminating against LGBT workers target "for traits or actions [that] would not have questioned in members of a different sex" (Liptak, 2020), thus making it an issue of sex.

Regarding Title IX, the definition of sex and to whom the protection applies continues to be contested. In 2021, there has been one case brought to the courts regarding Title IX that concerns a trans boy whose school denied him access to the bathroom associated with his gender identity. The United States Court of Appeals ruled that gender identity is protected under Title IX (*Adams v. School Board of St. Johns County, Florida*, 2020).

The remainder of issues concerning Title IX were addressed by the Department of Education (DOE) to provide schools with their interpretation of the law. As of May 15, 2020, the DOE interpreted Title IX in sports competitions to mean that cisgender students were discriminated against if they were to compete against trans girls, saying cisgender students competing against trans athletes were "denied... athletic benefits and opportunities, including advancing to the finals in events, higher-level competitions, awards, medals, recognition, and the possibility of greater visibility to colleges and other benefits" (Eaton-Robb, 2020).

Domestic Violence Shelters

For those seeking refuge from intimate partner violence (IPV), it becomes readily apparent that shelters are typically segregated so only women can enter the shelter. First- and

second-wave feminists were early founders of domestic violence shelters in the United States. As such, domestic violence shelters often center feminist philosophies and advocate for spaces that allow women to band together as a “sisterhood” as they heal (Apsani, 2018).

In 2020, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) proposed a rule that would legally allow single-gender shelters to turn away trans individuals based on their “biological sex,” playing into essentialist notions that gender and genitalia are one and the same. (Meyer, 2020). Trans women also experience violence and housing issues in relation to their gender identity. About half of trans individuals experience sexual violence at some point in their lives (Grant et al., 2011), and trans women make up half of LGBTQIA+ hate crime deaths (Office for Victims of Crime, 2014). Because of the violence and housing instability that trans women experience (Meyer, 2020), it is essential that trans women have access to shelters that provide housing, community, and a place to bond and grow with other women.

As Apsani (2018) details, many women’s shelters bar trans women from domestic violence shelters. Some shelters argue that trans women lack the lived experience of womanhood and that cisgender residents may be uncomfortable by the presence of trans women. In addition to privileging cisgender identities, Crenshaw (1991) observed that shelters typically center on the needs of white women and often leave women of color and those who do not speak English without the necessary resources to maintain their safety. Domestic violence shelters seeking to serve the needs of a variety of women must take a constructionist approach to gender identity by recognizing the spectrum of gender identities and creating spaces safe to those most vulnerable to violence.

Bathrooms and Locker Rooms

Carter (2018) noted that bathrooms have traditionally been segregated by gender under the premise of protecting women's safety and privacy. A secondary result of such separation is that gender essentialists are able to maintain their view of gender existing on a binary.

Westbrook & Schilt (2014) argue that gender-segregated spaces are not enforced equally and that the only spaces that are contested are those occupied by women:

We posit that bodies (mainly the presence or absence of the penis) matter for determining gender in women's spaces because of cultural ideologies of women as inherently vulnerable and in need of protection. ... Men, or more specifically, penises, are imagined as sources of constant threat to women and children, an idea that reinforces a construction of heterosexual male desire as natural and uncontrollable. (pp. 41, 46)

As a result of such mindsets, trans women are seen not as women, but as men and a threat to the safety and wellbeing of women and children under "the assumption that all men are potential rapists" (Westbrook & Schilt, 2014).

Sports

Sports have traditionally been gender-segregated under the assumption of gender existing on a binary. As such, they employ a similar rationale as bathrooms when considering gender segregation. In 1997, the New York Supreme Court ruled that a trans woman could compete in the U.S. Women's Open Tennis Tournament because she had undergone gender reassignment surgery and had been sufficiently "weakened" to compete as a woman (Westbrook & Schilt, 2014, p. 41). In 2003, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) adopted formal regulations concerning trans athletes and required those wishing to compete on the basis of their gender identity to (a) undergo a gender reassignment surgery, (b) have their sex legally changed (i.e. on

their birth certificate), and (c) undergo any necessary hormone therapy to “minimize gender-related advantages in sports competitions” (Westbrook & Schilt, 2014, p. 41).

In 2012, the IOC specified women’s testosterone levels need to be within the typical female range unless it provides no competitive advantage (Westbrook & Schilt, 2014). Most recently, Caster Semenya, a two-time Olympic gold medalist, lost a case against the IOC, which ruled that she cannot compete as a woman because her testosterone levels are naturally higher than that of the “typical female.” The IOC acknowledged the discrimination in its decision but clarified that it was a “necessary, reasonable, and proportionate means” of segregating on the basis of gender while maintaining the competitive spirit of the game (Longman & Macur, 2019).

Gender Segregation in Schools

In the United States, there is a history of gender segregation in schools. The initial reasoning for gender segregation was to limit opportunities for students to be distracted by socializing with students of the opposite gender (Dame, 2019). Research concerning the effectiveness of single-gender educational settings vary. In studies that have examined success in schools segregated by gender, success resulted from classroom sizes, quality teachers, parent involvement, and proper funding rather than gender segregation (American Civil Liberties Union, n.d.). When the United States Department of Education (2005) conducted a systematic review of single-gender schools, they were unable to show that students in those schools were more successful than their counterparts in gender-inclusive schools.

Safe Spaces for Women

In 1925, Michigan State University’s student union housed both men’s and women’s study lounges. The union eventually became a space for both men and women, but the women’s lounge “has long been a quiet, secure place for women. It is a safe refuge and serves as a haven

for reflection, study, and solitude” (Paquette, 2016). After hearing grievances from male students and people concerned about the effects gendered-segregated spaces have on trans students, the university decided to disband the women’s lounge and open it to all students on campus.

Mark Perry, a University of Michigan-Flint economics professor, filed a civil rights complaint against Michigan State University regarding the women’s lounge. After Michigan State University decided to disband the women’s lounge, Perry believed “MSU owes an apology to the thousands of men whose civil rights have been violated” (Wolcott, 2016). Lisa Schwartzman, a Michigan State University professor and director of the university’s philosophy department, found it “disturbing and troubling to see Title IX invoked in this manner. The Women’s Lounge is the one women-only space on campus. The claim that its very existence denies men access to an equal education is absurd” (Parquette, 2016). Cases like the one at Michigan State confirm some individuals’ beliefs that legal protections on the basis of sex, such as Title IX, could unintentionally have negative ramifications for women (Grayer & Stacqualursi 2020; Strauss, 2020; Sulfaro & Gill, 2019).

Opening Single-Gender Organizations to Trans People

Different organizations segregated by gender have approached concerns about inclusivity in a variety of ways. In 2018, the Whiffenpoofs, the world’s oldest collegiate a cappella group, announced they would no longer segregate on the basis of gender and would audition students on the basis of voice type. A traditionally male a cappella group, after the policy change, they held auditions and added their first female member to the ranks (Feilbel & Cui, 2018). Other groups maintained a more rigid approach.

In 2014, Mills College and Mount Holyoke College, two of the country’s oldest women’s colleges, announced that they were formally adopting policies that would allow trans and

nonbinary students to apply for admission to their university. At Mount Holyoke, the university instructed faculty to not refer to their classes as “ladies” unless they had confirmed that every single student identified as a woman. Lynn Pasquerella, the college’s president at the time, said the choice came from a desire to honor students’ positionality and that someone’s gender identity was personal, political, and not static (Caplan-Bricker, 2019).

Women’s and lesbian softball leagues have also wrestled with gender segregation and how to define who can be a member. Members of the leagues have increasing concerns about “fairness” and “safety” within their sport, which are among the reasons the spaces were founded in the first place (Westbrook & Schilt, 2014). Others maintain that enforcing rigid gender definitions ensures the league will maintain its identity as a place of “feminist resistance, safety, and empowerment” (Buzuvis, 2017, p. 156). In an attempt to be inclusive, one softball league changed their admission policies to the following:

Those eligible to participate include: (a) those individuals who sincerely and consistently identify as female, regardless of their sex assigned at birth; AND (b) Those individuals who were assigned a female sex at birth, regardless of their present gender identity so long as they feel that membership in women’s community is meaningful and appropriate for them. Players will determine for themselves whether they are qualified for membership under (a) or (b). (Buzuvis, 2018, p. 170)

Some worry about losing women’s spaces, but Travers (2006) argued that “the protection of traditional women-only space and the softening of the gender binary to be more trans-inclusive need not be mutually exclusive” (p. 444). By adopting formal changes in policy, these leagues can be inclusive while also challenging the binary nature of gender segregation in sports.

Summary of Gender-Segregated Spaces in the United States

In the United States, domestic violence shelters, bathrooms and locker rooms, sports teams, and schools have traditionally been segregated by gender. Schools have become more gender inclusive, but bathrooms, locker rooms, and sports continue to segregate. Title VII and Title IX offer federal protections on the basis of sex in the workplace and schools, respectively. In recent years, there has been debate on if *sex* also includes gender identity or sexual orientation. Although there are a number of legal battles concerning trans inclusion in single-gender spaces, some organizations—such as traditionally single-gender colleges or softball leagues—have taken it upon themselves to create policies that are more trans-inclusive. I will further explore these issues in the context of music in the remaining sections of this chapter.

Gender in Music Education

Setting the Context

Gould, Koza, Lamb, and O’Toole were among the first scholars to critically examine issues of gender in music education. In the wake of their work, many scholars have problematized the gendered nature of music education, which I will examine throughout the review of the literature. Below, I will examine the works of these scholars and the groundwork they laid for gender scholarship in music education to come in the twenty-first century.

Lamb (1994) saw feminism as a way to account for varying views and experiences in music education. She argued that the discourses presented in music are male-centric and do not account for differences in gender, race, and class. As a result, Lamb (1996) often felt that her identities as a woman and educator were in conflict with one another. The culture of music education teaches students that their teachers are likely to be male and that women are relegated to roles such as “diva or a piano teacher, but not a conductor” (Lamb, 1996, p. 128). A feminist

approach, she argued, was essential in considering difference in music education, problematizing dominant narratives in the field, and creating space for new perspectives.

In the early 1990s, Koza addressed gender disparity in research and curriculum. Koza (1993) examined the *Music Supervisors' Journal* from 1914-1924 and found that most of the topics addressed the needs of boys, such as career opportunities, the “missing male” in choirs, and musical and social preferences. When women’s issues were addressed, it was often only in the context of how their needs or skills differed from their male counterparts, making claims such as “boys are more likely to sing if there is a man at the helm” (Giddings & Baker, 1921, as cited by Koza, 1993). Koza critiqued instrumental methods books (1992), middle school music textbooks (1994), and choral texts (1993-1994), finding that women are underrepresented in music education texts and that the texts had underlying themes that were both misogynistic and homophobic. Hawkins (2007), Kruse et al. (2015), McBride and Palkki (2020) all built on these content analyses in a more recent context and found that while there were some positive trends toward gender inclusion, music education texts continue to perpetuate heteropatriarchal views.

Like a number of early scholars focusing on gender, Gould viewed gender issues through a feminist lens (2001, 2004, 2011), though some of her more recent work considers the intersection of gender and sexuality (Gould, 2005b, 2007, 2013, 2016). Gender, she argued, is inherent in all aspects of music education, and feminist scholars and educators can examine, critique, and reconsider how varying pedagogical approaches and curricular materials contribute to gender exclusion (2004). Gould highlighted the ways women are devalued in the field (Gould 2001, 2011), particularly in the job force, curriculum, and pedagogy. This position is shared by O’Toole (1994, 1998), who detailed how this specifically plays out in choral ensembles.

In 1998, O’Toole problematized the gendered hierarchies present in choral ensembles, arguing that the standard structures and hierarchies of choral ensembles privilege male singers and leave female singers feeling devalued. O’Toole proposed that choir conductors could make the treble ensemble the top choir, rather than the mixed ensemble, because choir programs are largely made up of female singers. Snow (2012) recalled moderating a regional American Choral Directors Association panel on gender in choral programs. “I had never seen a room of more angry participants. ... The very idea that there might be any institutionalized unfairness towards girls (or boys) was clearly uncomfortable for all in attendance” (p. 106). Although some all-state choirs have begun to have students audition according to voice part rather than gender (Palkki, 2016), gender disparities continue to exist in choirs. O’Toole (1998) reported that female singers can outnumber their male counterparts in choral programs by a ratio of 3:1. A recent national profile of high school music enrollment reflects a similar statistic, with female singers making up 70% of the nation’s choir program enrollment (Elpus & Abril, 2019).

There is a plethora of research discussing things such as the “missing male” (Freer, 2009b, 2015; Harrison, 2004; Harrison, 2007; Kennedy, 2002, 2004) and instrument selection (Abeles, 2009; Conway, 2000; Gathen, 2014; Harrison & O’Neill, 2000; Kelly & VanWeelden, 2014), but research prior to the 1990s seldom addressed the issues of women in music (Koza, 1993). Lamb et al. (2002) examined the history of women in music education, and the challenges music education researchers face when employing a feminist framework to their research. Lamb (1994) critiqued specific instructional practices in musicology and music education. Green (1997) examined how music education contributes to “the continued production and reproduction of gendered musical meaning and practice” (p. 3) and argued that educators and

scholars must address “how gendered music relationships are perpetuated in schooling” (Green, 1993).

Adler and Harrison (2004) have both urged scholars to consider a postfeminist approach to music education research rather than one focused on feminism. Harrison (2010) argued that scholars such as Lamb, Dollof, and Howe (2002) privileged a focus on feminism over issues relevant to both men and women in music. His research trajectory focusing on male musicians appears to contradict his argument. Adler and Harrison (2004) claimed Conway (2000) acknowledged that “most” of gender research has focused on women’s issues, when in reality, Conway said that “much” of gender research is viewed through a feminist lens—which does not explicitly denote a focus on women—and that “some of this research has been concerned primarily with opportunities for girls in schools” (Conway, 2004, p. 4). Additionally, my current review of the literature and the reviews conducted by other scholars (Eros, 2008; Freer, 2008; Trollinger, 1993; Wych, 2012) find no evidence to support the claim that music education scholarship has not properly considered male musicians, nor that conducting research focusing on women’s issues leaves male musicians without adequate representation.

Careers in Music

As a whole, women have been historically underrepresented in a variety of musical careers such as conducting, instrument performance, and composing (Cape & Nichols, 2012; Gould, 2005a; Grant, 2000). Bennett et al. (2018) found female composers felt women were underrepresented in higher education curriculum and that composition programs did not prepare them for non-musical elements of their career such as technology, music and the law, and business skills. The composers spoke to the importance of representation in career preparation

and called for composition and music professors to diversify their curriculum to include music composed and performed by women and in styles outside traditional Western classical style.

There is an inverse relationship with the age of students and the gender of the teacher. Women are more likely to teach younger students. As musicians get older, they are more likely to have a male conductor-teachers (Music Educators National Conference, 2001). This the result of gender discrimination and segregation, gender roles, and a lack of precedent, which leaves women aspiring to have careers in music beyond the Pre-K and elementary level with a lack of female role models (Gould, 2005a).

Instrumental Teachers and Conductors

Overall, men outnumber female conductors of instrumental ensembles. At the Midwest Band and Orchestra clinic, of the 602 bands ensembles that have performed between the years 1957-2008, only 51 of the ensembles have been conducted by women. The 51 ensembles consisted of elementary (n=13), junior high/middle school (n=35), and high school (15), with female conductors directing no university or military bands (Sheldon & Hartley, 2012). These statistics largely confirm the claims made by MENC (2001) and Gould (2005a) that women are far less likely to conduct upper-level ensembles compared to their male peers.

Gathen (2014) argued that there are three primary reasons for women being underrepresented as teachers of instrumental ensembles: gender bias in instrument selection, not participating in jazz ensembles, and lacking female conductors as role models. Because women are more likely to select instruments that do not traditionally exist in jazz bands (such as flute and clarinet), their opportunities to participate in jazz band are limited to traditionally masculine instruments such as the trumpet, trombone, and percussion. As such, women seeking to become band teachers may already feel at a disadvantage because of a lack of jazz training. I argue that

conductors could consider expanding ensemble membership beyond traditional voicing, including instruments such as flute and clarinet, so students have the opportunity to learn a variety of musics.

For women who do become conductors of instrumental ensembles, there are a number of barriers present. Given that orchestra conducting is a traditionally male-dominated field, masculine characteristics are often privileged over more feminine ones (Bartleet, 2008a, 2008b). As such, female conductors may feel the need to conform to traditionally masculine conducting and teaching styles (Bartleet, 2008a, 2008b) or forge their own way by embracing personal characteristics that could enhance the musical experience of the musicians in their ensemble.

Another barrier present for some female conductors is balancing motherhood and career. The participant in Fitzpatrick's (2013) study was a well-respected conductor of a high school band program and mother of three children ages 6 and younger. The participant found success in balancing motherhood through having a structured work and life schedule, receiving support from her spouse, and dedication to both her career and her family. Factors that made work-life balance difficult included lack of time, logistical errors, guilt, and standards that were different for men and women. This is supported in research talking about how women's children are seen as burdens, while men's children are seen as making them reliable (Ginther & Khan, 2006).

Choral Teachers and Conductors

Like Sheldon & Hartley (2012), VanWeelden (2003) found that women are underrepresented as choral conductors. VanWeelden's study focused on female conductors at colleges and found that 65% of ensembles were conducted by men and 20% by women. 15% of the ensembles did not list a conductor, however, which means the gender gap could be even wider. Only 17% of programs had a female director of choral activities, and only 17% of schools

had both male and female conductors on staff. Men's choirs are more likely to be conducted by men (80.7%) than women (19.3%). The same can be said for women's choirs and female conductors, but the gap is less severe, with 61% of women's choirs being directed by a female conductor and 39% by a male conductor. Although I saw positive trends toward a balance of male and female conductors across all types of ensemble voicings, the overall trends are the same: while women are receiving more doctorates than men (Stohlmann, 2018), women are still sorely underrepresented as choral conductors (McKiernan, 2014).

Brenneman (2007) examined issues specific to female conductors of choral ensembles. Female conductors highlighted the importance of mentorship as they pursued a career as a conductor, which is typically associated with men. Although they did not necessarily experience gender discrimination in the field of choral conducting on a regular basis, they felt they were not as respected by instrumentalists and conductors of instrumental ensembles. Female mentors were influential as they considered a career in conducting, but mentors were typically family members and female musicians in their lives rather than conductors. Bannerman's study highlights the importance of equal gender representation in printed materials and ensemble conducting so female musicians know they can pursue conducting as a career.

Women are more likely than men to conduct women's ensembles (VanWeelden, 2003), but there are exceptions. Swan (2012), a male conductor of a women's ensemble, authored a chapter in Spurgeon's (2012) book *Conducting Women's Ensembles* and spoke to his unique experience as a conductor of a women's ensemble. He spoke to his perception of how he was perceived by others, saying his male colleagues wondered why he would agree to conduct a women's ensemble knowing they are viewed as second-rate. Because women's choirs are more

often than not conducted by women, he also felt like he wasn't seen as a "club member" among his female colleagues who also conducted women's choirs.

Although it is uncommon for men to conduct collegiate women's ensembles, it is even less common for women to conduct collegiate men's ensembles. Stohlmann (2018) focused her study on three women conducting men's choirs at universities in the United States. Stohlmann critiqued Graf (2016) because he perpetuated the idea that men's ensembles will respond better to a male conductor. To the contrary, Stohlmann interviewed members of the men's ensemble to speak to the respect the women had as conductors, referring to them as "a brotherhood contain[ing] one sister" (p. 101). The participants in Stohlmann's study enjoyed the challenge of conducting a men's ensemble and embraced the opportunity to be among few women in the United States conducting all-male ensembles.

Music and Identity Development

Multiple scholars have detailed how participation in music ensembles influences musicians' identity development. Through an autobiographical narrative, Moore (2008) reflected on how participating in various choral and instrumental ensembles throughout adolescence influenced her gender identity. By interviewing family, friends, and former music teachers and classmates, she was able to create a more complete picture to examine her perception of her own gender, feelings of self-worth, and how they influence her identity as a teacher.

Moore's (2008) reflection on her gender and musical identity is similar to the findings of Hansen (2012), Lipson (2013), Monks (2003), and Nannen (2017). In studying sexual and gender minority youth in ensembles, Hansen (2012) detailed how adolescents developed both their musical and non-musical identities through a sense of shared musical purpose with peers, feeling like successful musicians, and having their musicianship recognized and praised by

fellow musicians. Although the voice can be an essential part of one's gender identity, Palkki (2016) had one participant who embraced the fact that their voice defied gendered stereotypes. A number of scholars have more explicitly discussed the connection between the adolescent voice change, singing in single-gender choral ensembles, and identity development (Graf, 2016; Parker, 2018; Ramsey, 2013; Stohlmann, 2018; Sweet, 2010; Sweet & Parker, 2019), which I will discuss later in this chapter. A number of other factors impact students' connection and retention in music ensembles, such as socioeconomic status (Shaw, 2017) and school culture (Bannerman, 2016; Watson et al., 2019), but gender and social perceptions of gender roles in relation to music have a significant impact on students' desire to participate in music ensembles.

Instrument Choice

Eros' (2008) and Wych's (2012) literature reviews showed the extent of studies examining gendered instrument stereotypes. Overall, instruments such as the flute, clarinet, and violin are perceived as feminine; brass and percussion as masculine; and saxophone and horn as being gender-neutral (Abeles & Porter, 1978; Delzell & Leppla, 1992; Sinsel, et al., 1997). Gendered instrument stereotypes tend to have a greater impact on male students (Cramer et al., 2002; Sinsabaugh, 2005; Taylor, 2009). Female students and younger students who have yet to be enculturated in instrumental ensembles are more likely to break away from gender stereotypes when selecting their instrument (Conway, 2000; Abeles, 2009).

Little has changed in regard to gender associations with instruments since the 1970s (Abeles, 2009). In particular, males' preferences for instrument selection have largely remained unchanged over the past 100 years (Harrison, 2007). Kelly and VanWeelden (2014) found that students generally applied the same gendered stereotypes to unfamiliar instruments (such as the sitar, gyl, and suling) as they did to ones typically used in Western music. The only exceptions

were percussion instruments, but the researchers noted that the limited number of percussion students participating in the study may have had an influence on that set of data.

Harrison and O’Neill (2000), Conway (2000), and Fund (2020) examined ways in which students’ perceptions of instrument selection in relation to gender may differ. Harrison and O’Neill (2000) had students observe musicians playing instruments that differed from stereotypes associated with instrument selection. They hypothesized that female students would become more interested in instruments played by female musicians that went against gender stereotypes (such as females playing percussion instruments), and vice versa for males. Although the study did not confirm their hypothesis, students were more likely to have a decreased interest in an instrument in which the musician was the opposite gender (e.g., a female student observing a male playing piano—an instrument traditionally associated with femininity). In Conway’s (2000) phenomenology, students chose instruments with the desire to be unique, revealing that students are conscious of gender stereotypes and make choices accordingly.

Fund (2020) used Gordon’s (1991) Instrument Timbre Preference Test (ITPT) to see if using the test changes instrument selection in elementary school. Gordon argued that selecting instruments on the basis of timbre preference contributed to higher levels of player satisfaction and overall retention in instrumental music education programs. Although other scholars (Abeles and Porter, 1978; Harrison and O’Neill, 2000) have also suggest selecting instruments based on timbre preference (Abeles & Porter, 1978; Gordon, 1991; Harrison & O’Neill, 2000), gender stereotypes and bias often play an even more critical role (Fortney et al., 1993; Gathen, 2014). Fund’s (2020) found that using the ITPT did not change gendered instrument selection compared to the traditional instrument selection process (e.g., an instrument “petting zoo” where students can see, hear, touch, and play a variety of instruments before choosing their final instrument).

Although educators play an important role in determining the gender culture in their music classrooms, teachers must also keep in mind that there are larger social factors at play and that they should focus on creating positive gender associations and representation in their classroom.

Adolescent Voice Change

Male Voice Change and Vocal Identity Development

The adolescent male changing voice has been a major topic of discussion in choral pedagogy for years. After decades of scholars calling for singers to stop singing until the voice change is complete (Sweet, 2019), McKenzie (1956) advocated for singing through the voice change. Reiterating the need to normalize the changing voice, Swanson (1973) called for choral pedagogues to base their approach to the voice change on data rather than popular and potentially unfounded methods.

Since Cooksey (1977) published his classification system for working with adolescent male singers, the *Choral Journal* has dedicated 33 articles to the adolescent male changing voice (Sweet, 2016). Over the course of 100 years of MENC (Music Educators National Conference, now known as National Association for Music Education) journals, scholars addressed the male changing voice in more than 400 articles (Freer, 2008). Specific topics of focus included attitudes toward the changing voice, social issues, and practical steps toward addressing students' needs. Cooksey (1992) went on to publish a book outlining the stages of the adolescent male changing voice, range, tessitura, vocal quality, register development, group voice classification, and specific vocal pedagogical approaches to address the elements of the male changing voice.

Killian (1997) argued that scholars should consider both the physiological and psychological impacts of the voice change. Freer (2015, 2016) found many male singers experiencing a sense of identity loss as they struggled to have control of their changing voices.

Teachers, therefore, must account for social factors and the impact of the individual as they address the male voice change. In measuring singing self-efficacy of 6th-, 7th-, and 8th-grade males enrolled in choir, Fisher (2014) noted that males with more experience in choir had a higher singing self-efficacy and argued that the choir conductors and participants in the study fostered environments that encourage males to have positive associations with singing.

In a call to action, Kennedy (2002) and Freer (2016) advocated for teachers to provide their students with a more concrete understanding of the various aspects of the male changing voice. Male singers in each of the studies felt a variety of social pressure related to singing in choirs and reported a desire to know more about their voice change. In a research-to-resource article, Freer (2018) argued that focusing on vocal technique, specifically breath control, is essential if teachers want male musicians to be engaged with singing for the long-term.

Female Voice Change and Vocal Identity Development

Compared to the literature on the male changing voice, there is less literature focusing on choral pedagogy specific to adolescent females. Gackle penned the first article in the *Choral Journal* concerning the adolescent female changing voice (Huff-Gackle, 1985). Since her first article, there have only been four articles focusing on the female changing voice, two of which she wrote (Gackle, 1991, 2006). Siple (1994) wrote about improving the singing self-image of adolescent females with changing voices through improving tone quality.

Gackle (1991, 2006, 2011) and Sweet (2015) noted specific characteristics of the adolescent female voice change, including challenges with phonation on certain pitches, limited endurance, and breathiness. Sweet (2015) commented on how many of the elements of the adolescent female changing voice mirror aspects of the male changing voice (Cooksey, 1992, 1999). After Gackle's (1991, 1992, 1997a, 1997b) publications, Cooksey expanded on his 1992

book *Working with the Adolescent Voice* and released *Working with Adolescent Voices* (1999) to include Gackle's adolescent female voice classification system.

Like others (Freer, 2015; 2018; Killian, 1997), Gackle (2006, 2011) and Sweet (2015, 2018, 2019) called for choir conductor-teachers to look beyond the purely physical aspects of the voice change and consider the mental, emotional, and social development of the singers, as well. Gackle's (2011) book *Finding Ophelia's Voice, Opening Ophelia's Heart: Nurturing the Adolescent Female Voice* included both practical tips for working with adolescent female singers—such as developmental phases of the changing voice, vocal techniques, and literature selection—as well as accounts from singers ages 11 to 36 detailing how their voice change has affected them in the past and present. Singers spoke of feeling helpless about their voice change, losing a sense of self, and lacking confidence. Based on reports from students, Gackle advocated for educating students on the aspects of the voice change, echoing recommendations made by Kennedy (2002) and Freer (2016) for adolescent male singers.

Sweet (2015) and Sweet and Parker (2019) delved deeper into the emotional impacts of the adolescent changing voice. Sweet and Parker (2019) reflected on their own experiences and revealed that they, too, experienced long-term ramifications as a result of singing in adolescence. Both Sweet and Parker were assigned to alto parts early on because of their experience with piano, sight-reading and aural skills, and ability to belt harmonies. Parker eventually switched to sing soprano, but she “felt a loss of purpose in choir and missed the challenge of more difficult harmonies” (p. 65), while Sweet continued to fear singing higher pitches because of her lack of experience with that part of her vocal range. Because adolescent females typically have similar vocal ranges to one another, Gackle (2011), Sweet (2019), and Sweet and Parker (2019)

encouraged teachers to consider rotating singers through parts—or having them sing both soprano and alto in choir—so the singers evenly develop their vocal range.

Similarly to Gackle (2011), Sweet (2018) found that even with the passing of time, adult female singers largely have negative memories related to the adolescent voice change. Singers reflected on the challenges they experienced, their vocal insecurities, and how they sacrificed their individual needs for the greater good of the ensemble. As a result, singers struggled with musical self-confidence and continued to have negative singer identity into adulthood. Sweet's (2019) book *Thinking Outside the Voicebox: Adolescent Voice Change in Music Education* reimagined an approach to adolescent singers that advocates for educators to expand their perception beyond the physical aspects of the voice change and consider the social and psychological effects, as well. Though not specific to the female changing voice, it is a valuable resource for music educators looking to take a more holistic approach to the adolescent voice.

Gender and Choir

Long-held gendered stereotypes are pervasive in choral music. Palkki (2015) problematized masculine ideals in choral ensembles and how they negatively affect both cisgender males and trans singers. Given the ever-evolving discourse surrounding gender in the choral ensemble, choral conductor-teachers should examine how gender and choir intersect, reject binaries—such as male/female—and acknowledge that gender is nuanced and on a spectrum. Specific actions conductors can take include selecting repertoire that does not perpetuate gender stereotypes, examining choral hierarchies and recruitment tools that may privilege certain gender identities, and revisiting rehearsal vernaculars such as referring to voice parts or choirs as male/female, boy/girl, or man/woman.

Four years later, Freer (2019) wrote “An Ethical Response to the ‘Gender Trouble’ in Choral Music” and called for choral conductor-teachers to “get back to football. Or, in our case, a focus on teaching and conducting choral music” (p. 23). In this article, Freer misgendered a singer and uses an analogy in which he compares trans individuals to fish, both of which can be dehumanizing experiences for trans individuals. McWhirter (2019) praised Freer’s approach because choral conductors “may not all be of the same mind and philosophy on how to approach these issues” (p. 6). She called for the American Choral Directors Association (ACDA) to foster an environment that allows for diverse opinions on topics such as gender.

Although McWhirter was probably correct in believing that some conductors may not believe in trans identities, Freer (2019) implied that issues related to gender can be separated in choral music. Given that Freer has historically focused on male issues in choral music (Freer, 2006, 2008, 2009a, 2009b, 2013, 2015, 2016, 2018), he knows the impact of gendered practices have the potential for negative consequences for adolescent singers. He acknowledges that male singers have needs that choir conductors should address, but his response does not apply the same philosophy to trans singers. As I consider statistics surrounding trans students’ rejection in educational settings (Kosciw et al., 2017), I call on educators to reexamine gendered practices in choral music education with special consideration for trans and gender-expansive musicians. Although there are positive reports of music teachers’ perceptions of trans students (Silveira & Goff, 2016) and LGBTQ students seeing choral classrooms as a safe space (Palkki & Caldwell, 2018), educators must continue to make strides in creating spaces that are welcoming and safe for trans musicians.

Single-Gender Choral Ensembles

Under the guidelines of the 2016 Title IX “Dear Colleague Letter,” choirs likely fall under the list of “nonvocational single-sex classes” that are exempt from gender segregation (Lhamon & Gupta, 2016). Dame (2012, 2019) explored retention rates and perceived benefits and drawbacks of single-gender ensembles. In these studies, Dame found teachers believed boys and girls did better in single-gender settings because their teachers were better able to cater to student needs through things like repertoire selection. Some teachers believed students are more likely to take risks in single-gender ensembles. “Beginning students are very self-conscious and unwilling to do things that they perceive make them look foolish. . . . They are more willing to try these things (and therefore improve faster) in a single-sex environment” (Carp, 2004, p. 30).

Some institutions turn to tradition as a reason for gender segregation. Boy choirs are often among these organizations. Although some English boy choirs have started admitting girls, they are often still separated by gender for performances and services. Others still see the change as a threat to what makes the choirs so great: the unique pure tone produced by a boys’ choir. Welch & Howard (2002) contended that much of the idea surrounding perceptual differences between boys’ and girls’ choirs is one that is not rooted in reality. They recruited participants who would be professionally familiar with children’s voices—cathedral directors, choir conductors, and voice teachers—had them listen to recordings of the children’s choirs, and asked them to determine if the choristers were boys, girls, or both. The researchers found that the participants were not able to correctly identify the choirs’ makeups above a level of chance, calling into question the perception that boys’ choirs have a discernibly different tone.

There are a number of books, book chapters, and articles specifically addressing single-gender choral ensembles. There are some that address the trend to move away from classifying

choirs by gender (Palant, 2014; Sieck, 2017), but the vast majority of these books continue to be rooted in a binary conception of gender. Palant's (2014) book, for example—*Brothers, sing on!: Conducting the Tenor-Bass choir*—has a number of contradictions. Although the book's title implies moving away from choirs being classified by gender, the title also refers to “brothers,” and the description says the book will talk about strategies for working with men's choirs. Resources addressing men's choirs approach the strategies with the assumption that male singers require special techniques for recruitment, retention, and embracing masculinity (Barham, 2001; Reed, 2008; Trott, 2020).

Literature focusing on the needs of women's choirs work under the assumption that female singers are often undervalued in choral programs (Carp, 2004; Dame, 2019; Gackle, 2011; Spurgeon, 2012). Phillips' (2003) choral methods text briefly addressed the topic of gender in choirs. A section on male singers focuses on how to encourage males to join choir and specifically talks about men's choirs. The section on female singers reads as follows:

Sometimes the absence of boys in a choral program forces a choral director to create a separate choir for the many girls who, if included, would overbalance the boys in the mixed chorus or choral union.... the choir should not be called a “girls” chorus, as this makes gender the major criterion for choir membership, which is not legal. Criteria for such a choir should include vocal ranges (treble) and quality. Care must be taken that girls or women in this chorus not be made to feel like second-class citizens. This ensemble should form a valuable part of the feeder program. (p. 55)

Despite the fact that Phillips specifically addressed men's choirs, he claimed women's choirs are not legal, though there is legal precedence for gender segregation in schools (Paige, 2002).

Phillips also called for conductors to make female singers feel valued while referring to a treble

ensemble as “a valuable part of the feeder program” (p. 55). Such philosophies, however, can make singers in a women’s or treble ensemble feel that they are only valued as potential singers in advanced mixed ensembles, rather than valuable members of one of the many ensembles offered in a given choir program (Gauthier, 2005; O’Toole, 1998; Wilson, 2010, 2012). As such, choral conductors need to reflect on the discourses surrounding gender and prestige in their choral programs.

Like other single-gender spaces, conductors of traditionally single-gender ensembles have much to consider with regards to gender inclusion. Some trans singers may embrace single-gender spaces as places in which they can find a sense of acceptance and belonging related to their gender identity. A nonbinary singer, on the other hand, may find single-gender choirs to be another space in which a gender binary is enforced, thus leading to the erasure of identities that do not conform to a male/female dichotomy. Even the name of an ensemble can convey the purpose and values of an ensemble (Hill, 2021). For example, a choir such as “Women’s Choir” or “Bella Voce” may imply that the choir is open only to women or that it is made up of treble voices. In Hill’s program, he and his choristers chose to change the name of their choir, “Women’s Chorus,” to “Aurelia,” an homage to the school’s colors that still embraced femininity without implying that trans or nonbinary students may not be welcome.

Some choirs and choral organizations have chosen to move away from classification systems that center on gender (Palkki, 2016, 2020), and other choirs may embrace their gendered nature. Palkki acknowledged that there is not a single approach that will work for all choir conductors, singers, and choral programs. All conductors must take gender into consideration when teaching choral ensembles, and address things such as gender norms, cisheteronormativity, gender identity and expression, uniforms, membership policies, and repertoire selection. By

addressing the gendered nature of choral ensembles, conductor-teachers can create environments where both the conductors and singers can discuss issues of gender, challenge their thinking, and adapt ensemble policies and pedagogies based on the needs of the members of the ensemble.

Male Singers in Choir

Over the years, there has been a focus on the “missing male” in choral ensembles. Bennetts (2013), Freer (2009a, 2009b), and Harrison, Welch, & Adler (2012) spoke to the need to keep male singers engaged to retain ensemble membership. There appears to be a consensus among scholars that male singers are less likely to engage in singing because views rooted in cisheteronormativity (Ashley, 2010, Hall, 2005; Harrison, 2007; Koza, 1993-1994; McBride & Palkki, 2020, Palkki, 2005; Sweet, 2010), including the pressure to conform to masculine ideals, fear of failure, and choir not engaging in physical activity (Nannen, 2017). In an attempt to fit in with their peers and avoid social consequences, boys may shun singing altogether (Bannerman, 2016). In elementary school, female singers have the largest influence on their male peers in regards to negative attitudes associated with singing (Ashley, 2010). By the time students reach secondary schools, however, the opinions of male peers (Nannen, 2017) have the greatest pull, and female classmates begin viewing boys who sing as “cute” (Ashley, 2010). Ashley argued that teachers must be diligent in fostering an environment where male and female singers respect one another.

Rather than focus on why boys stop singing, Heywood & Beynon (2007) sought to understand what keeps boys enrolled in choir. They found that male singers continued singing because of social interaction, feeling valued, and a desire to build their musicianship. These results mirrored Kennedy’s (2002) findings where boys sang because of their love of music and support from peers and teachers. Conversely, Freer (2006) reflected on his experience with

singing where a teacher encouraged him to only mouth the words rather than sing. As a result, he disengaged with choral singing until college. Freer's experience speaks to the important role that teachers have in the musical life of their students. Conductor-teachers can focus on a number of elements to engage males in singing, including creating an environment focused on student self-esteem (Freer, 2009a), acknowledging and addressing the social culture of singing in relation to school culture and gender (Bannerman, 2016; Freer, 2009; Watson et al., 2019), and encouraging male singers to see their voice as a means for expressing their identity (Elorriaga, 2011).

One way conductors can address gender in their choral programs is through the creation of single-gender ensembles. After looking at choral retention between the 6th and 7th grades, Dame (2011) found that there was a positive correlation between ensemble retention and enrolling in all-male ensembles. The teachers believed students preferred singing in single-gender ensembles, but the study only focused on conductors' perspectives, and not that of the students. Others found that students in single-gender ensembles had fewer behavior problems (Carp, 2004; Dame, 2019; Williams, 2012), more progressive views about gender and sexuality, and an increased sense of safety and comfort talking about vulnerable topics, particularly those related to emotions (Ramsey, 2013). In an intrinsic case study of her own students, Sweet (2010) found that male singers had positive associations with their all-male choir, but the students did not report gender as the reason the choir was supportive, but rather "the importance of teamwork and dedication" (p. 10). Both Sweet (2010) and Ramsey (2013) highlight the important role that conductors play in creating an environment that is open and accepting for all students and that social norms related to gender must be taken into consideration when working with adolescent singers.

Female Singers in Choir

Throughout school and society, girls experience neglect and devaluing (O'Toole, 1998). When asked how singing impacted their self-concept, one singer reported, "I have found that singing gives me a much-needed confidence in a world that gives me images that I cannot live up to" (Gackle, 2011, p. 132). Choirs, therefore, have the potential to play a vital role in musicians' perceptions of self, both musical and otherwise.

Sweet & Parker (2019) found that assigning adolescent female singers to a voice part (e.g., soprano or alto) had long-term ramifications on singers' vocal identities. Because teachers may assign voice parts based on the needs of the choir rather than those of the individual singer (Sweet, 2018), the young women often felt like they had to accept their assignment rather than advocate for their needs. This is also compounded by the fact that female singers in the study revered their secondary choral teachers. As a result, their voice assignment became an essential part of their musical identity. Many singers reported negative emotions associated with this time in their life, including anxiety, fear, insecurity, and an unhealthy desire to please others.

Singers generally view women's choirs as being less prestigious (Gauthier, 2005; O'Toole, 1998; Snow, 2012; Wilson, 2010, 2012, 2013), which impacts their musical self-concept. After choir auditions at her university, Gauthier (2005) recalled watching a female student search for her name under the mixed ensembles—which are viewed as the most prestigious (O'Toole, 1998; Sieck, 2017; Snow, 2012). When she found her name under the membership for the women's chorus, "she wrinkled her nose and made an audible groan" (p. 43) because she felt like an inferior musician. Honor choirs have reconsidered the all-state ensemble structures, including equally assigning female singers to mixed and single-gender ensembles so students see the choirs as being equally important (Snow, 2012). "When I work in states where

top numbers of female singers go to the mixed choir, I am keenly aware that I have an increased need to ‘win them over’” (Snow, 2012, p. 107) in the women’s ensemble.

Gauthier (2005) surveyed her university’s choral singers to determine the ensembles in which the singers most desired to sing. 90% of her school’s female singers said their first-choice ensemble was the school’s mixed ensemble. Rather than listing reasons for why they wanted to join the mixed ensemble, they were motivated by not being a member of the women’s ensemble, referring to women’s choirs as having a “lack of substance” and sounding “whiney,” “breathy,” and “out of tune” (p. 43). These attitudes may be related to their experiences in high school (Major, 2017). Sieck (2017) noted that mixed choirs are not inherently better but that singers have been conditioned to believe the sound of mixed or men’s ensembles is superior.

O’Toole (1998) argued that choral conductors should reconsider ensemble hierarchy and makeup in the choral programs, such as splitting all singers equally between parts or choirs. Another possible solution is creating a select, auditioned treble ensemble to elevate the place of female voices in the choral program. Wilson (2013) explored choral programs that added an auditioned women’s ensemble and found the members had an increased sense of pride about their membership in the ensemble given the public recognition they received.

In spite of a choral culture that devalues female singers, women’s, girl’s, and treble ensembles have the potential to play a transformative role in the lives of singers. The participants in Parker’s (2018) study felt they were able to gain a more positive sense of self because of—rather than in spite of—the single-gender nature of their ensemble and were able to grow concurrently as individuals and as a group of women. The singers of the Seattle Girls’ Choir valued having a place in which they could make high-quality music with other female singers who were equally dedicated to singing. Like singers in Ramsey’s (2013) dissertation, the girls

felt the choir was a safe place to express and explore their emotions specifically because of the single-gender nature of the choral ensemble. Single-gender choral ensembles have the power to foster environments in which singers can unite and grow as singers and individuals. It is up to the conductors of these ensembles to consider the many musical and social facets of these choirs and address the needs of their students accordingly

Trans Issues

The study of trans issues in music education is relatively new. Nichols's (2013) article, "Rie's Story, Ryan's Journey: Music in the Life of a Transgender Student," was the first article in the *Journal of Research in Music Education* that explored trans issues in music education. Since then, Bartolome (2016), Palkki (2015, 2016, 2020), Palkki and Caldwell (2018), Silveira and Goff (2016), Silveira (2019), and Sullivan (2014) have added to a growing body of research troubling the gendered nature of music education.

Overall, music teachers have positive attitudes toward trans students (Silveira & Goff, 2016), with female respondents and teachers with liberal political affiliations having the most positive attitudes. Although 90.2% of the survey respondents in Silveira and Goff's study agreed with the statement "It is the responsibility of school staff to stop others from making negative comments based on gender identity or expression," trans students overwhelmingly continue to hear negative comments about their gender expression and feel unsafe at school (Kosciw et al., 2016).

A number of articles specifically addressed issues of inclusion for trans students in music education (Cates, 2019; Gurss, 2018; Miller, 2016; Palkki, 2017). Most of these articles are specific to choral music education. Silveira's (2019) study focused on the experiences of an instrumental trans music education student, but the study focused on and provided few

considerations specific to conductors of instrumental ensembles. Elements specific to instrumental music education that scholars could consider include instrument choice, marching bands, uniforms, and gender representation in the workforce.

Bartolome (2016), Nichols (2013), and Silveira (2019) all engaged in narrative inquiry as a means for documenting the process trans students went through as they transitioned and how their gender identity intersected with their experiences in music programs. Trans students experienced varying levels of support from family, varying from feeling full support (Nichols, 2013), support with reservations (Bartolome, 2016), and feeling the pressure to take family member's feelings into consideration as they transitioned (Silveira, 2019). Some of the participants in Palkki's (2016) dissertation saw their voice as a critical element of their transition, while others embraced the fact that their voice type did not conform to gendered norms. For all the participants, music program, school, and district policies guided how they transitioned, and mentors such as music teachers acted as essential support systems as the students transitioned.

In exploring the experiences of trans students, Bartolome (2016), Nichols (2013), Palkki (2016, 2017, 2020), Sauerland (2018), and Silveira (2019) stressed the importance of music educators acting as advocates and allies for their students and adjusting their pedagogy to their students' needs. Teachers must consider things such as students transitioning (Bartolome, 2016; Nichols, 2013; Palkki, 2016; Silveira, 2019), the gendered nature of songs (Sauerland, 2018; Palkki, 2015), ensemble makeup and hierarchy (Bartolome, 2016; Palkki, 2015, 2016, 2017), vocal pedagogy (Sauerland, 2018; Palkki, 2016), uniforms (Palkki, 2016, 2017; Silveira, 2019), and institutional policies (Nichols, 2013; Palkki, 2016; Silveira, 2019). Central to all of these studies is the critical role that music educators play in creating trans-inclusive environments.

LGBTQIA+ Issues in Music Education

Discussing issues of sexuality in music education is still a relatively new topic in the field. Bergonzi's (2009) article specifically addressed topics of sexuality and highlighted the privilege heterosexual teachers and students experience in music classrooms. Wilcox and Robinson (2010), the *Music Educators Journal* editors at the time of Bergonzi's publication, spoke to the overwhelming responses they received regarding Bergonzi's article. As such, they dedicated a column to publishing the responses. People who wrote letters to the editor voiced a variety of opinions ranging from being grateful that the issues were being discussed to readers wanting to cancel their MEJ subscriptions because they believed discussions of sexuality have no place in education. Although some music educators may find the inclusion of issues related to sexuality to be controversial, Freer (2013) found that LGBT topics are underrepresented in music journals compared to other arts disciplines.

LGBTQIA+ identities may not be exclusively related to gender, but gender and sexuality are inextricably linked. As such, scholars must consider an intersectional approach to account for the intersecting identities. Hess (2016) spoke to a culture in which LGBTQIA students are expected to "translate" heteronormative discourses in music classrooms to their own experiences. Expecting students to do the brunt of the work to make music classrooms meaningful to their experiences, however, is a form of oppression, and educators must engage in an intersectional approach:

For educators, the recognition of complex, intersectional identities is crucial to ensuring that we serve our entire student population. Students and educators are all uniquely situated at intersections of multiple identities. Understanding the complexities in which we ourselves are situated in relation to the complex identities that the students we teach

hold facilitates a deeper understanding of the human relations unfolding in education. (p. 84)

By acknowledging the ways in which intersecting identities influence the lived experiences of musicians, researchers can highlight the complexities of human identity and center the experiences of minoritized communities. Thomas-Durrell's (2019) exploration of the experiences of Black lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer music educators teaching in the Bible Belt highlighted the importance of understanding how varying and, at times, conflicting identities influence music education. Thomas-Durrell advocated for more professional development addressing identity issues in music education.

Responding to the call by queer theorists, Shane (2020) queered the discourses of music classrooms and considered how issues of homophobia, transphobia, and gender performativity present themselves. In order for students to feel affirmed in their identities and continue participating in music classes, Shane argued educators must consider the role of the media, reconsider musical traditions, and create spaces in which students feel safe to express themselves and make choices for themselves.

LGBTQIA+ music educators struggle with negotiating their sexual identities in the workplace. Some educators may feel comfortable revealing their sexual orientation, while others may not. Melanie, a trans music educator, only came out to a few fellow educators, but she was informed by the districts' human resources department that parents in the school had found out and were concerned that she might be using the students' restrooms (Bartolome, 2016). Given the support she received from staff members and her district, Melanie felt safe as a trans music educator, though that may not be true for all trans teachers (Kamenetz, 2018). As a whole, educators experience tension between their gender and sexual identities, how gender and sexuality issues

intersect with music, and whether they should come out to their coworkers or students (McBride, 2016; Minette, 2018; Paparo & Sweet, 2014; Thomas-Durrell, 2019, 2020).

Pre-service music education programs play a vital role in addressing issues of gender and sexuality for future LGBTQ teachers (Palkki & Sauerland, 2019). Taylor et al. (2020) interviewed five preservice music educators and found that as a whole, they felt they were not adequately prepared to cover topics related to sexuality and gender in their future classrooms. Taylor (2018) examined a mentorship system in which LGBTQ preservice music educators were matched with a music educator with whom they shared gender or sexual identity. Even though some mentors and mentees had differing opinions about how educators should approach their own sexuality and LGBTQ issues in the classroom, the inservice and preservice teachers were able to create mutually beneficial relationships centered on respect and support.

Need for Study

Gender and choral music are inextricably linked. Choral music educators have a number of issues consider related to traditionally single-gender ensembles. Single-gender choral ensembles have the potential to be safe environments for students to discuss difficult topics—such as gender and emotion—and grow and unite under a shared identity. As individuals in society problematize the gender binary, however, educators must also consider how single-gender ensembles perpetuate gender norms that can be harmful to cisgender and trans students alike. Educators, therefore, have an important role to play when creating environments that are inclusive of a variety of potentially minoritized identities, including gender.

Although gender has been extensively studied in music education, public discourse regarding trans issues in music education is relatively new, and studies centered on intersectionality in music education are limited. Scholars have problematized gender in relation

to choral ensembles, but scholarship on single-gender ensembles largely centers on the experiences of cisgender singers. This study seeks to provide a narrative of choral music educators of traditionally single-gender ensembles, how they consider and address issues of gender in their choirs, how varying identities such as sexuality and race intersect in single-gender ensembles, and the issues with which conductors struggle in creating environments inclusive to a variety of identities.

Even though gender is at the heart of this study, I used an intersectional approach considering feminist, queer, and transgender theory to explore the various aspects of identity that influence how participants perceive their own gender, the gender of others, and the culture of gender in their ensembles. I sought for this project to highlight the complexities of gender issues in choral music and to confirm that there is not a single approach that will work for all singers, choirs, and conductors. The end result of this dissertation is not a specific list of recommendations for whether choir conductors should continue traditions of ensembles based on gender or not. Rather, I sought to incite conversations in the choral community and encourage conductors to ask questions of their own as they problematize gender practices and traditions in the choral community.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I explain the purpose of this study, how I came to narrative inquiry as my methodology, safeguards for conducting narrative research with issues surrounding social justice, the ethnographic techniques I employed, and how I considered my role and power as a researcher in this project. Through an emergent design focused on the participants' stories, I address the ways I conducted observations and interviews, as well as how I analyzed the data. I further discuss areas of limitations.

Purpose and Research Puzzles

The purpose of this dissertation is to tell the stories of conductors leading traditionally single-gender ensembles and how they consider practices and discourses surrounding gender in choral music. Through an intersectional approach, I explored gender in relation to multiple layers of identity such as race, religion, sexual orientation, and class. I applied feminist, queer, and trans theories to have a multi-faceted understanding of the issues while acknowledging that there is no single truth, solution, or story to be told. Through storytelling, I sought to have a more nuanced understanding of the things choral conductors should consider when creating environments that embrace gender diversity. Given my research goals, narrative inquiry was the ideal means for exploring “the multiple levels (which are temporally continuous and socially interactive)” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 4) of gender and music. I applied ethnographic techniques to center participant voices while also creating space to co-construct a narrative that acknowledged my subjectivity while focusing on participants' lived experiences.

Narrative inquiry scholars approach research not with questions, but with puzzles (Caine et al., 2013; Caine et al., 2018; Clandinin et al., 2007; Clandinin et al., 2016; Clandinin et al., 2018; Roulston, 2018). Considering puzzles as opposed to questions requires the inquirer to be

actively engaged with the research and focus on the individual and “reformulation of an inquiry” (Clandinin et al., 2016, p. 26) rather than defining a problem before knowing the nature of the people and phenomenon. By consulting the conductors and the singers of the women’s and men’s choirs, I moved away from research questions, which are rigid from the outset, and instead “shape[d] and reshape[d] the research puzzle” (Clandinin et al., 2016, p. 79) throughout my dissertation. As a result of this process, I explored the following topics:

1. How conductors’ intra- and interpersonal experiences with gender influence the ways they see and experience gender.
 - a. How those experiences influence their choral pedagogy.
2. The discourses surrounding gender in traditionally single-gender choral ensembles.
 - a. How those discourses are created.
 - b. Who creates the discourses.
3. Practices conductors employ to create environments honoring and valuing a variety of gender identities.
4. The areas in which conductors feel they succeed in creating or struggle to create environments honoring and valuing a variety of gender identities.

Though these stories cannot be generalized to a wider population, the purpose of this study was to learn from these stories and move from the theoretical work of conceptualizing gender issues to action (Hess, 2013). As I approached this project, I did not have a pre-determined solution. Rather, through storytelling, I, alongside the participants and the readers, came to “deeper ways [of understanding] the nature of experience” (Clandinin et al., 2016, p. 26), have a more nuanced understanding of the issues concerning gender in traditionally single-gender ensembles, and consider new ways of thinking and acting.

Narrative and Ethnographic Design

Music education scholars studying gender have employed a variety of qualitative approaches. Although there are studies that utilize grounded theory (Parker, 2018) and phenomenology (Conway, 2000; Sweet, 2010, 2015; Sweet & Parker, 2019), the vast majority of the researchers considering gender in music education do so through case studies and narrative inquiries. I believe case study, which is bound by time and place (Creswell & Poth, 2018), would not have been the ideal method for examining participants' past and present experiences while also considering their "future possibilities" (Caine et al., 2018, p. 142). Rather than "thinking about" the stories and experiences of the participants, I sought to "think with" (Bochner & Riggs, 2014, p. 207) and collaborate with the participants as they constructed the narratives. The narratives centered on the participants, and my positionality inevitably influenced how I understand their stories. With participants, I collaborated so "the stories are co-composed in the spaces between us as the inquirers and the participants" (Clandinin, 2013, p. 24), all while acknowledging the ways that the participants' personal biases and lived experiences alongside my own influenced how the stories were told. It is with these goals in mind that I centered my design on narrative inquiry.

Narrative Inquiry

Connelly and Clandinin (1990) first addressed narrative inquiry in education research as they explored human experience through stories. Narrative inquiry, they argued, involves the "construction and reconstruction of personal and social stories" (p. 4). As a result, narrative inquiry considers the ways individuals' experiences influence the way they come to know and understand their lives (Clandinin et al., 2007, p. 22) Because narrative inquiry encourages researchers to move away from binary thinking and the existence of a singular truth, (Hanrahan

and Cooper, 1995, as cited by Thomas-Durrell, 2019), both researchers and participants engaged in narrative inquiry can consider a “multiplicity and diversity of approaches” (Lyons, 2012, p. 6) as a way to learn and grow together as they consider experiences that differ from personal experience.

Narrative inquiry centers the voices of the participants “as a way of honoring lived experience as a source of important knowledge and understanding” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 17). It is both a process and a product. The process of narrative inquiry involves the researcher beginning with a personal narrative to determine their relationship with the topic at hand. From there, both the participants and researcher unearth and generate stories from multiple perspectives, often collaborating throughout the process. The end product is a narration focused on the lives of those involved with the research (Clandinin, 2013).

Focusing on experience is common across various methodologies. What makes the approach unique to qualitative research is how the experience is presented (Barrett & Stauffer, 2012). Researchers engaging in narrative inquiry seek to create a “work that reverberates and resonates in and through the communities it serves” (Stauffer & Barrett, 2009, p. 20). Because storytelling is at the heart of narrative inquiry, researchers, participants, and the audience are encouraged to not think *about* stories, but rather to think *with* them (Frank, 1995) and to “[move] away from dominant narratives and toward openings to imagine otherwise in dynamic and interactive waves” (Caine et al., 2018). Some of the participants and some audience members may find it easy to address these issues, and others may find the process to be difficult. Through storytelling,

...readers are invited to enter into dialogue with narratives that depict the difficult choices about how to act that we all face over the course of our lives and to contemplate the

possibilities and limitations we encounter when we attempt to become authors of our own stories. (Bochner & Riggs, 2014, p. 203)

Researchers utilizing narrative inquiry should not seek universal truths or “correct perspectives on educational phenomena,” but rather “raise significant questions about prevailing policy and practice that enrich an ongoing conversation” (Barone, 2007, p. 486). By highlighting difficult choices privileging people over data points, I encouraged readers to consider new viewpoints and possibilities concerning issues of gender in choral ensembles.

Narrative Inquiry in Music Education

Narrative inquiry is relatively new to research in music education. The first music education conference focusing on narrative inquiry (First Narrative Soundings: International Conference on Narrative Inquiry in Music Education [NIME1]) took place in 2006 (Nichols & Brewer, 2017). Narrative inquiry has experienced increased popularity in education research because of the relational nature of sharing stories (Clandinin et al., 2007). Since NIME1, narrative inquiry has become a more popular method for examining gender in music education, as evidenced below.

Narrative inquiry occurs in several forms. Moore (2008) sought to examine her own experiences with gender and music through the use of an autobiographical narrative. By applying an autobiographical, or *autoethnographic*, approach, Moore analyzed the many factors contributing to personal experience and contextualized them within society (Muncey, 2008). Moore interviewed her former middle school, high school, college music teachers, former classmates, and family to hear their perspective on her musical experiences and to generate a narrative that was richer than if she had focused on only one line of inquiry.

Brenneman (2007) studied three female choral conductors and how their careers had been impacted by gender. In honoring their experiences, Brenneman allowed the participants to generate their own questions to “describe their thoughts, feelings, and experiences to gather the detailed, thick data that is needed to examine the narratives that emerge” (p. 52). Each of the participants highlighted the importance of support and mentorship, as well the discomfort with the label of being a “female” choir conductor instead of simply referring to them as a choir conductor. Some did not see gender as an influential factor in their career. As the dissertation unfolded, Brenneman became a participant and was able to reflect on how her experiences as a woman shaped her professional world. Her reflexivity was essential in considering how her pedagogy perpetuated gendered stereotypes and moved her to adapt her teaching accordingly.

As of the spring of 2021, Nichols’s (2013) article “Rie’s Story, Ryan’s Journey: Music in the Life of a Transgender Student” was the only article that has been published in the *Journal of Research in Music Education* that explores trans issues in K-12 music education. By nature, narrative inquiry breaks down the traditional barriers and power dynamics present in a researcher-participant model and creates a narrative told by “two active participants who jointly construct narrative and meaning” (Riessman, 2008). Through narrative inquiry and “critical storytelling” (Barone, 1992) Nichols was able to create space for Rie to tell her story as a trans musician. One example of this was Rie’s decision to alternate between Rie (she) and Ryan (he) throughout the narrative to depict their journey with music and gender identity. Rie remarked how music classrooms provided more space for her to be herself than she was able to find throughout the rest of the school. With Rie, Nichols (2013) calls on music educators to consider the unique needs of trans students as they explore their identities: “Music educators are full citizens in the world of education, and we have much to contribute to the ongoing conversations

regarding safe schooling and social and emotional learning” (p. 276). The implications of this study, both in terms of how the story was told and the content therein, have had lasting impacts on the field of music education and challenged researcher power and responsibility. When Nichols (2016) reflected on her experience with Rie, she noted the “thundering silence” (p. 444) she received when she attempted to incorporate the perspectives of teachers and administrators from Rie’s school:

I don’t want Ryan’s story to be easy. I don’t want to write a moral tale. I don’t want to wag a finger. I want the story to require readers to make a choice of incorporating Ryan’s story into their understanding of the world or to reject it, but I do not want it to be ignored. (p. 444)

I see this as a distinct strength for researchers engaging in narrative inquiry. I did not initiate this study with the goal of finding explicit solutions. By centering the study on participant experience, the audience will be able to expand their understanding of the issue at hand, consider how their personal experiences vary from those of the participants, and make decisions related to gender accordingly.

Since “Rie’s story, Ryan’s Journey,” there has been a growing body of research that gives voice to trans students in music. Bartolome (2016) noted that before working with Melanie, a trans music educator, she had seen herself as an ally to the LGBTQ community. As she learned about and through Melanie’s experiences, however, she discovered she was largely unaware of ways she could make accommodations for gender-diverse students. As a result, Bartolome made changes to her pedagogy, including student teaching policies, threading topics of social justice throughout the music education curriculum, and knowing where the gender-neutral bathrooms

were on campus. Melanie shared the immense pressure of being trans in a time when so many people are still learning about what it means to be trans:

I have been so many people's first trans person. And I remember a lot of the time being limited by that because I told myself, "If this is the person's first experience with a trans person, I want it to be good." (p. 43)

Melanie's experience is a critical reminder for researchers to care for the stories of participants. Narrative inquirers must trouble the power dynamics of the researcher-participant relationship and tell participant stories the way they were intended to be told. I consider this relationship later in the chapter as I explore the role of the researcher, social justice, and relationality.

Through narrative inquiry, Palkki (2016) centered the lived experiences of three transgender music students. Because Palkki did not intend for these narratives to represent the experiences of all trans people, he was able to highlight the differences between participants as part of the study, rather than feeling forced to find shared themes and similarities. For example, while one participant felt a deep connection between their gender identity and their singing and speaking voice, another participant did not and embraced their voice type that went against traditional gender expectations. Through narrative inquiry, Palkki was able to create a list of recommendations for how choir teachers can be more welcoming to transgender students, including guidelines for name changes, rooming assignments, ensemble structures, uniforms, bathrooms, and gender-inclusive language. The results of Palkki's study could not have been predetermined. The recommendations came from listening to the storied lives of the participants. Through learning about the participants in the current study and their experiences, I have come to understand the struggles choir conductors have and, with participants, make recommendations in Chapter 9 for how conductors can consider gender in choral ensembles and move to action.

Ethnographic Techniques

In ethnographic research, the focus is on individuals in a greater community with a shared identity or culture. Ethnographers seek to understand what is shared within those communities and how shared experiences, behaviors, and values contribute to the greater sense of connection and identity. Examples of such communities include schools, minoritized populations, religious groups, and subsets of a given culture (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Qualitative researchers such as Bannerman (2016), Giebelhausen (2015), and Palkki (2016) used ethnographic techniques in research that may otherwise not be considered a pure ethnography. In Giebelhausen's (2015) case study, she employed ethnographic techniques such as audio-recorded interviews, field notes of classes, rehearsals, performances, and communications. Bannerman (2016) conducted an ethnographic case study to explore a choir program as a culture in and of itself. Bannerman interviewed the choir teacher, staff at the school, students, and the parents of students in the choir program to better understand the choir program's culture within the school. Consulting outside sources helped create a narrative that was more vibrant and real than would have been possible had Bannerman only consulted the participants. Creating a multidimensional narrative brings the audience as close to the story as possible, thus encouraging them to consider how the narratives may parallel their own lives.

Palkki (2016) encouraged the participants to apply an ethnographic lens to their experiences as gender-diverse musicians to give voice to their own experiences. As a researcher, Palkki used another ethnographic technique—thick description—to center the “rich stories” (Palkki, 2016, p. 88) as told through the voice of the participants. Because the discourse surrounding trans issues in music education is relatively new, Palkki's use of thick description in narrative inquiry showed a dedication to allowing participants to speak their truth and, as a

result, encourage educators to discuss and address policies concerning grander-expansive musicians in the field of music education. I utilized thick description to address the multifaceted nature of participants' experiences so the audience can relate the struggles of participants to their own teaching.

Studies employing ethnographic and narrative techniques help create rich depictions of individual lives and the cultures in which they live. Given the personal nature of individual experience, however, researchers must address several ethical considerations. This is especially true when studying issues related to social justice. In the section below, I define social justice, its role in education, and how I sought to honor participants while exploring topics that impact minoritized communities.

The Ethics of Studying Social Justice Issues Through Narrative Inquiry

Social Justice in Music Education

Before I can address social justice issues in choral music education, I must first determine what social justice means to me as an educator and a researcher. Like Hess (2017), I look to Vaugeois's (2009) definition of social justice: the process of looking at systems of power and oppression and engaging in active resistance (Hess, 2019). Hess (2019) argued that resistance involves "refusing to accept deficit discourses of minoritized youth, while simultaneously naming and/or challenging unjust conditions" (p. 488). By its very nature, education centered on social justice must encourage resistance on the part of teachers and students to examine curriculum and explicitly communicate values critically. This can be done through things such as repertoire selection, contextualizing music in time and space, and critically analyzing what and who are present or absent in regards to representation in our classrooms, which helps our

students advocate for schools and us as teachers to create a curriculum that best fits their lived experiences (Hess, 2017).

Even though social justice has offered a lot of advancements in the field of education, Westheimer (2015) claimed the term itself has been vilified within and outside of education. Despite the strides education has made from a policy standpoint because of social justice educators and activists,

To say that one supports music education for social justice is simply to say that one supports the idea of enlisting music education in the service of improving society by making it more just, preparing students to use the knowledge and skills they develop in the music classroom to identify ways in which society and societal institutions can treat people more fairly and humanely. (Westheimer, 2015, pp. 109-110)

Social justice is not a state of mind, but a call to tangible action. Because choral ensembles are inherently gendered, choral conductors seeking to trouble the notion of gender binary and traditional gender roles must openly address these topics in their ensembles.

Jorgensen (2015) argues that educators must consider justice in the ways they approach education for four reasons: 1) justice is at the heart of democratic society, 2) music as a subject is one that represents and creates culture, 3) “justice emphasizes the worth, dignity, and preciousness of individual human beings and reinforces a sense of self-respect and self-worth in those who pursue and receive it (p. 10), and 4) justice creates spaces for multiple narratives, including competing ones, and allows them to be in conversation while moving forward with actionable policy change. Music education must center on the lived experiences of students to address the ways we can advocate for and build up students and teach them to do the same for themselves. Throughout this dissertation, I explored this from the perspective of the teachers as

they outlined ways in which they created ensembles centered on justice. The students were not primary participants in this study, but their voices acted as a compass as the conductors created spaces for varying beliefs to exist while co-constructing ethical policies in their ensembles.

Narrative Inquiry and Social Justice

Narrative inquirers must take special care when telling the stories of participants. If researchers approach a story with the intent to fit it into a preconceived notion of what is just, they run the risk of misconstruing the stories into something they are not (Riessman, 2008). These stories, however, can be catalysts for change. For example, women and members of the LGBTQIA communities within the feminist and queer movements have come together, told stories, found shared experiences between their lives, and started social movements that sparked nationwide change. It can be easy to view theory and social change as two separate entities, but I believe that utilizing theory to analyze social justice issues is essential to challenging sexist oppression and enacting change.

When researching social justice issues, narrative inquirers must take caution to not anticipate the outcomes of the study:

In naming these ‘social justice problems’, and framing consequent research questions into particular ‘social justice issues’, participants and people more broadly can become at risk of having their experiences, their stories, written about, and for them, written over or, perhaps, squeezed to fit into the predetermined issue or problem. Lives, and the complex and continuous composing of lives, might also become invisible. The policies and practices that extend from such research might miss the very issues or problems they were intended to address or resolve. ... As long as people remain constructed as

problems, and are known first and foremost in relation to the issues or problems they face, social justice practice will be difficult to achieve. (Caine et al., 2018, p. 139)

At its core, narrative inquiry is a means for telling stories. As such, narrative inquiry must center on participants and experiences, rather than displacing participants for the sake of the social justice issues at hand. By focusing on experience rather than problems, I was able to center participants and their stories through narrative inquiry.

Building Relationships Through Narrative Inquiry

Focusing on the participant, and not the issue, is also essential in maintaining a relationship between the inquirer and participant that is grounded in respect and trust. Bochner and Riggs (2014) propose that treating stories as data “privileges the point of the analyst” and that “encountering stories experientially... privileges the standpoint of the experience” (p. 205). Stories are certainly data points in qualitative research, but they are first and foremost the experiences of real people. When participants entrust researchers with their stories, researchers must in turn treat them with respect and highlight “why the story matters deeply to the person telling it” (Frank, 2010, p. 6). Narrative inquirers must not be so focused on the outcome of the study that participants’ experiences are “sacrificed at the altar of methodological rigor” (Bochner & Riggs, 2014, p. 205). Instead, researchers should favor and focus on the perspective of the storyteller (the participant) rather than the analysis of the listener (the researcher). Storytellers in this study trusted me with their stories, and it continues to be my responsibility to tell their stories as they were meant to be told.

By focusing first on building relationships, narrative inquirers can highlight the nuance of social justice issues in the lives of participants. Narrative inquiry does not seek a single truth, but rather one that is constructed as they come to know people through their lived experiences:

It has been in living alongside participants in narrative inquiries that we came to know social justice concerns, concerns which are often not easily named particularly when, in order to be named, the complex unfolding of lives, of who participants and we each are and who we are each becoming, needs to fit within dominant narratives. Much seems to be ‘at risk’ if this need to fit within dominant narratives is the only possibility. ... Here, our work can then make significant contributions to practices and policies, but not in a way that is predetermined. To adopt a social justice lens in advance of an inquiry with participants is, for us, a preconception that can cover over experience. For a narrative inquirer, it is the relationship that becomes the context in which issues of social justice or injustice arise and can be inquired into; it is also within the relationships that we can live in ways that reflect socially just practices. (Caine et al., 2018, p. 142)

By listening to participants and applying feminist, queer, and transgender theories, the participants and I were able to highlight and unpacked the intersectional nature of identity issues present in their lives. How they approached diversity, equity, and inclusion invariably differed because of their individualized life experiences. Narrative inquiry “[allows] for movements away from dominant narratives and toward openings to imagine otherwise consequent actions” (Caine et al., 2018, p. 142). A narrative inquiry that considers social justice work in education invites new conversations and ways of thinking while moving teachers to action.

Narrative Inquiry, Ethnographic Techniques, and Emergent Design

Like Palkki (2016) and Thomas-Durrell (2019), I employed narrative inquiry and ethnographic techniques to explore social justice issues in music education. My study had an emergent design to allow participants to reveal their truths. The value in an emergent design lies in the freedom for inquirers to “give up control” (Riessman, 2008, p. 24) by reconceptualizing

the relationships between participant and researcher, storyteller and inquirer. The act of research, in turn, becomes one that is continuously negotiated and reconstructed as the storyteller and inquirer co-construct the narrative and final research product.

In studying social justice issues, a co-constructed and emergent narrative and design further trouble the nature of power in research and holds the researcher accountable to their participants and audience (Hess, 2018; Patel, 2016). Rather than fitting a narrative into a preconceived notion of social justice, narrative inquiry and ethnographic techniques within an emergent design encourage the researcher to “[address] problems that emerge from participants rather than from outside university-based researchers” (Hess, 2018, p. 587). By selecting an emergent design, I addressed the ethics of telling the stories of others by meeting the needs of participants rather than focusing on what I as a researcher would get out of the project. I address the design that emerged through the research process later in this chapter.

Role of the Researcher

Before researchers can effectively and openly build relationships with participants, researchers must explicitly identify their role within the research (Krueger, 2014). Narrative inquiry intentionally disrupts the researcher-participant dynamic. Other methods may encourage the researcher to discover or generate findings, but narrative inquiry allowed me to act as a participant in the co-construction of participant narratives. I did not search for a single objective truth about gender in choral ensembles. Instead, participants and I co-constructed and co-interpreted a narrative that was nuanced, centered on the humanity of the participants, and encouraged the reader to consider new ways of thinking (Bochner & Riggs, 2014; Carless & Douglas, 2017; Hollingsworth & Dybdal, 2007; Reissman, 2008).

In research, there is potential for imbalanced power dynamics between the researcher and the participant. Narrative inquirers must acknowledge the vulnerability of participants for sharing their stories and, in return, “care for participants and their truths” (Thomas-Durrell, 2019, p. 57). I consulted with participants and colleagues throughout the process of this study and continuously critiqued my methods, bias, and subjectivity (Bannerman, 2016; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Roulston, 2013). I was forthright with participants about my bias, acknowledging that I struggled with the knowledge that spaces that bring me comfort (women’s choirs) could also be ones that do not necessarily foster gender-inclusive environments and policies.

Data Collection and Procedures

Participant Selection

Given the historically gendered nature of choral ensembles, I sought female and male conductors of women’s and men’s choirs, respectively (conductor recruitment materials are located in Appendix A). I believe this sampling provided interesting and different perspectives depending on the participants’ gender identity and the type of ensemble they conduct. Because of the relatively small sample, as well as the personal and sensitive nature of the research topic (Palkki, 2016), I chose purposeful sampling, which allowed me to tell the stories of conductors who had actively considered these topics in their ensembles.

The first participant is a conductor with whom I have a professional relationship. Megan is a cisgender female conductor in her 30s and directs a women’s ensemble.³ Prior to this project, she had wrestled with balancing inclusion while creating a safe space for women. At the beginning of the project, her choir was currently classified by gender. She finds women’s spaces to be safe and empowering and wanted to actively engage students in conversation about gender

³ All names used for participants in this dissertation are pseudonyms.

issues in the ensemble. The second participant, Chris, was recommended to me by a colleague. He is a cisgender male conductor in his 40s and conducts a men's choir. Chris conducts a choir that has a recent history of programming music centering social justice issues and collaborating with organizations such as mental health clinics and the LGBT resource center on campus. Chris is also aware of the image that comes with all-men's groups and that the image can be assumed to be exclusive. Both Megan and Chris approached this project with a desire to reflect on their own teaching practices and consider how they could best foster environments that supported and empowered trans and gender-expansive singers.

Confidentiality

The participants shared deeply personal information with me and displayed significant vulnerability as they revealed aspects of their own identity and the ways in which they struggled with creating inclusive environments. It was essential for me to prioritize confidentiality in order to sustain trust with them. I maintained participant confidentiality by keeping all documents on a password-protected external hard drive in a locked drawer in my desk, using pseudonyms for individuals and locations in all project files, and being purposeful in sharing quotes that do not reveal any personally-identifying information.

Observations

Observations are an essential element of studies with narrative and ethnographic designs and act as an essential source of data throughout the study. My criteria for observation were based on my research goals and puzzles (Crewswell & Poth, 2018) to "link beliefs and attitudes" expressed in interviews "to actions" (Krueger, 2014, p. 135). As such, observations largely focused on elements such as repertoire selection, discussions about the pieces, and relationship

building within the ensemble. I conducted interviews via Zoom and observed the choirs during synchronous rehearsals (via Zoom).

I was able to attend one rehearsal each for Megan and Chris to get an idea of their teaching and rehearsal styles. Because Megan and the women's choir engaged in an in-depth process to interrogate inclusion within their ensemble, I observed and participated in nine meetings, discussions, and workshops. The first meeting focused on providing background on the study, terminology that would be used throughout the study in relation to gender, and some of the gendered elements of the ensembles that the singers would problematize. The second and third meetings involved anonymous surveys in which students reflected on what they valued in the choir and their perceptions of gender inclusion in women's choirs. They were also given an opportunity to see some of their peers' anonymous responses and reflect individually on how their opinions and perceptions were similar or different. In the fourth and fifth meeting, Megan and I shared our backgrounds and perspectives related to the project, and students discussed ways to engage in difficult conversations. The final four meetings were workshops in which the students looked at the various aspects of the ensemble, such as the name, membership policies, and ensemble bio to determine which elements of the choir were inclusive and which aspects needed adjustment. The specifics of these meetings will be discussed more in Chapter 5.

Initially, I engaged with the students as an educator, giving them background on the study and framing the ways in which gender is present in choral settings. Because I had facilitated a similar project with a women's choir in the past, Megan asked that I act as a participant-observer (Creswell & Poth, 2018) so as to act as a guide, expert on gender research, and resource to her and the students. As students engaged in initial discussions, I asked follow-up questions and provided my own perspective on certain elements that I felt students may not have considered,

such as nonbinary singers and singers who had not disclosed their gender identity in the ensemble. Researchers acting as participant-observers or complete participants must “remain conscious of the effect that their own presence, biases, values, and assumptions have on the interpretations, dynamics, and other participants that they seek to understand” (Krueger, 2014, p. 138). One of the complications that could arise for being a participant observer or complete participant is that the researcher can miss essential points of data because their focus is split (Bogdewic, 1992). Because all observations were recorded, I was able to account for potential distractions by revisiting the recordings and purposefully focusing on new elements on additional viewings.

As the choir moved toward the workshop phase of the project, I largely acted as a non-participant observer “to be as unobtrusive as possible... to minimize influence on the participants, trying to understand their world, beliefs, actions, and culture” (Krueger, 2014, p. 138). During the workshops, I largely only engaged in discussions with Megan and the students when prompted through questions or for students seeking clarification. Because I was only able to observe a rehearsal for the men’s choir, I was a non-participant observer.

I utilized jottings in a variety of ways. Jottings from initial observations provided another point for asking follow-up questions in interviews to create a more fleshed-out and nuanced picture. I then converted jottings into fieldnotes and from there into thick descriptions to paint a vivid and multifaceted picture of participants that “presents detail, context, emotion, and the webs of social relationships” (Denzin, 2001, p. 100). I was not able to observe the choirs in person, and choirs did not operate in the same ways as they did before the COVID-19 pandemic. I consulted with the conductors and singers and watched recording of previous choir performances to get more complete idea of the overall culture and climate of the choirs.

Interviews

Narrative and ethnographic interviewers seek to “generate detailed accounts rather than brief answers or general statements” (Riessman, 2008, p. 23). To achieve this, I utilized both open-ended questioning and probing in semi-structured interviews. Open-ended questions “invite interviewees to tell a story, and can generate detailed descriptions about topics of interest to the interviewer” (Roulston, 2013, p. 6). Initial interviews helped generate probes, or “open-ended follow-up questions” (Roulston, 2013, p. 6) to provide more clarity and greater depth in understanding the participants’ opinions and experiences.

After obtaining participant consent (consent forms are located in Appendices B and C), I audio and video recorded all interviews. I transcribed the interviews as quickly as possible after they took place to care for lapses of memory and accurately connect the jottings I took during interviews with my coding process. After I transcribed the interviews, I sent them back to the participants for member checks. Because the nature of the narrative was co-constructed, I asked participants to reflect on their interviews through member checks to reflect on their responses and to give them an opportunity to clarify, respond, and expand on any elements of the interview that they felt were among the most important parts of the narrative. At times, this process included participants looking at past interviews and highlighting the ways that their attitudes had changed over the course of the study, thus highlighting the contradictions and conflicted feelings within their stories.

Because the purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of choral conductors, I began the study by interviewing the conductors. Through observations and interactions with the choirs, I was also able to connect with students who were interested in sharing their perspectives about the choirs, the conductors, and their conceptions of gender inclusion within the ensembles.

All of these interviews contributed to the thick descriptions that are characteristic of narrative and ethnographic studies.

The majority of interviews followed a semi-structured design to allow participants to focus on what they believed to be the most meaningful aspects of their experiences. The semi-structured nature of the interviews allowed me to predetermine a set of topics and questions to address regarding identity and gender, which I referenced and use throughout interviews. The semi-structured interview protocol can be found in Appendices D and E.

Data Analysis and Relationality

Data Analysis Spiral, Memos, and Coding

The emergent design of this study required analyzing the data in a way that is not “off-the-shelf” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 185). I utilized a form of analysis called the “data analysis spiral” (Creswell & Poth, 2018), which requires data to be analyzed at all stages of data collection. Creswell & Poth (2018) described the process as occurring not in a straight line, but loops. The first loop, *managing and organizing data*, involved creating an organizational system in which I contained the data. Because data collection took place electronically, I stored all of the data in digital files.

The second loop, *reading and memoing emergent ideas*, involved writing memos. This process transformed jottings into analytic memos, which often act as “researcher journal entries” where researchers can “dump [their] brain[s]” (Saldaña, 2016, p. 44). These memos lived largely in the margins of my jottings, fieldnotes, and transcripts, and other sources of data such as course syllabi that I consulted throughout the process.

Analytic memos were essential as I entered the third loop, *describing and classifying codes into themes*. This loop transformed the plethora of memos and codes into more succinct

and encompassing themes. Creswell & Poth (2018) suggested creating a list of “lean” codes and only adding to the codes as necessary throughout the continuous spiral. For the first round of coding, I focused on *in vivo* codes to ensure the participants’ voices and experiences were centered in my analysis (Saldaña, 2016). I continually used *analytic codes* when reviewing observations, field notes, and interview transcripts to inform future interviews, analyzed the data through each of the theoretical frameworks, and determined where their experiences aligned or diverged from those theories (Roulston, 2013). Because this study generated personal and raw data, I also used emotion and affective coding to highlight the sensitive nature of their stories, which would allow the readers to connect with the participants in a more intimate way (Saldaña, 2016).

The fourth loop, *developing and accessing interpretations*, connected the emerging themes to theory and related literature. Consulting with participants allowed me to have additional opportunities to understand their stories and consider what the participants, audience, and researcher could learn from those experiences. By comparing emerging themes to theory and related research, all parties involved were encouraged to continually challenge their assumptions and consider how experiences similar or dissimilar to their own could inform new ways of thinking.

The fifth and final loop, *representing and visualizing the data*, provided me structure to report the data in ways that are relatable and understandable to the audience. Although this is the final loop in the “data analysis spiral,” researchers should not see it as the end of data analysis: “the processes of data collection, data analysis, and report writing or not distinct in the process—they are interrelated and often go on simultaneously in the research project” (Creswell & Poth, p.

185). This was especially true as I co-constructed stories with participants to ensure that I honored their experiences.

Relationality

Because narrative inquiry often involves reflecting on deeply personal narratives of an individual's life, researchers engaging in narrative inquiry must be dedicated to the ethics of building relationships with their participants:

In narrative inquiry, inquirers must deepen the sense of what it means to live in relation in an ethnical way. ... Ethical considerations permeate narrative inquiries from start to finish: at the outset as ends-in-view are imagined; as inquirer-participant relationships unfold, and as participants are represented in research texts. (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 482)

As a researcher, the participants entrusted me with their stories to share with others. It was essential to share interview transcripts with participants and allow them to make edits, but it was only a small part of building a relationship with participants that was centered on trust.

Throughout interviews, I verbalized my understandings so as to not misconstrue participants' stories, stayed within the predetermined time limit of interviews, and discussed topics beyond the dissertation itself to build meaningful relationships (Barratt & Maddox, 2016). Rather than unilaterally selecting which narratives I included in the study, I consulted with participants to ensure that I told their stories as they intended for them to be told.

Like the participants, I also came to this study with my own experiences and biases, which in turn influenced the ways in which I came to understand the participants' stories. When researchers attempt to remain objective by creating space between themselves and the participants, they may create environments in which the participants feel devalued or seen as

data rather than a person. Additionally, if participants feel like they are seen as data rather than people, they may feel removed from active participation in telling their personal narratives (Hess, 2018). As I co-constructed the narratives with participants (Roulston, 2013), revealing my bias and experience was essential as I built relationships with the participants. As I interpreted the narratives of the participants, I encouraged them to critique my narratives and perspectives, as well, to further complicate the traditional power dynamics present in researcher-participant relationships.

In an attempt to create multiple systems for participant input and feedback, I triangulated of multiple points of data such as transcripts, fieldnotes, literature, theory, and analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 260). As I wrote jottings, memos, fieldnotes, thick descriptions, and transcribed interviews, I provided the participants with transcripts and my analyses in the form of member checks. Because the primary purpose of this study was to give voice to participants' experiences, it necessitated that the participants had the means for accepting, challenging, and expanding on the information they provide and my analyses therein. With the participants, I triangulated data analysis through "reflexive triangulation" (Patton, 2002) to determine if the analysis is "believable," "reasonable," and "[connects] to how people understand the world" (Patton, 2002, p. 561). This occurred throughout the analysis, as well as interviews, and was essential to build trust between the participants and the audience (Bannerman, 2016; Giebelhausen, 2015).

I acknowledge that even the ways through which I established the process are influenced by my positionality and biases. From the outset of and throughout this project, I communicated with participants about my personal experiences and how they influence my bias (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Throughout data analysis and as the design emerged, I had colleagues review my analyses and challenge me to consider new ways of knowing and understanding.

Limitations

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, my interaction with participants and their sites was limited to digital platforms. The nature of the choirs was inevitably be different given the pandemic. As a result, the choirs I observed were not standard representations of how the conductors and ensemble members had experienced choir. I considered this complication in interviews with the conductors.

The three criteria I used for purposeful participant selection—male and female conductors of traditionally single-gender ensembles interested in discussing inclusion—did not consciously seek out participants that varied based on gender-variance, sexuality, race, religion, or other dominant or minoritized identities. Both Megan and Chris are white, cisgender, and were raised in Christian religions traditions. As such, some conversations about intersectionality had similar themes given the semi-homogenous demographics of the participants. The field of music education is largely overrepresented by white teachers (Elpus, 2015), and there must be more research that centers intersectional approaches and identities. I discuss intersectional approaches to research and analysis in Chapter 9.

Participant Introductions

In this section, I will introduce the participants of this study. Although Megan and Chris are the primary participants in the study, I have also included brief descriptions of some of their students whom I interviewed individually. The descriptions provided below will provide an initial background to the participants, how they came to music, and their social justice priorities through choral music. Chapters 4 and 5 will provide more detailed and nuanced descriptions of Megan, and Chapters 6 and 7 will focus on Chris.

Megan and the Women's Choir Singers

Megan Harris [she/her/hers]

Megan Harris is a white, cisgender woman in her 30s and teachers conducting and a women's choir at Lowell University (LU). She describes her parents and upbringing as “progressive, democratic, and Catholic” (Interview, 11/10/2020) As a child, Megan was heavily involved in music and attended private Catholic school for her K-12 education experience. Although she and her peers were acutely aware of the influence gender had on their high school choir program—such as the teacher giving male students preferential treatment—she said she was not aware of conversations surrounding gender inclusion and that she would not be involved in discussions surrounding gender inclusion in choirs until after she graduated from graduate school.

Prior to teaching the women's choir at LU, Megan's experience with women's choir was limited to her first year in high school and occasional pull-out choirs during her Master's program. When she began working with the LU women's choir, she realized the negative associations with the women's choir and sought to positively alter the image of the women's choir through quality musical experiences. Eventually, she realized that she needed to address social aspects, too, and started making concerted efforts to program music that fostered conversations about social justice. Although Megan believes women's choirs can be empowering spaces for singers, she has concerns about the message that the word “women” may send to trans and gender-expansive students. Megan entered this project with the desire to explore gender inclusion with the singers of the women's choir and determine ways the choir could become more inclusion to singers of a variety of gender identities.

Michael [he/him/his]

Michael is a second-year music therapy major and sings in the Lowell University

women's choir. As a trans man, Michael has not disclosed his gender identity to Megan or the singers in the university's women's choir. Although he feels he could safely do so and would be accepted and embraced in the choir, he has not disclosed his gender identity to his parents, and he fears that someone in the ensemble would unintentionally disclose his identity to his family.

In high school, Michael sang both in a women's and a mixed ensemble, and he is now in his second year of singing in the women's choir at Lowell University. Ultimately, Michael would like to sing in the auditioned mixed ensemble at Lowell University because in his experience, singing in mixed ensembles is more rigorous. Although he believes in the importance of women's spaces, Michael has experienced discomfort singing in the women's choir because much of the discussions do not apply to him and his experiences as a trans man. In talking with his trans and gender-expansive friends who are not in the ensemble, many of them have said that they would be interested in joining the choir but see the gendered classification as a barrier for entry.

Olivia [she/her/hers]

Olivia is a first-year music therapy student at Lowell University where she sings in the women's choir. She was drawn to LU because of its friendly and open music program, which contrasted with many of the competitive schools at which she auditioned. Initially, she had hoped she could sing in the auditioned mixed ensemble, but she had conflicts with her course schedule and other time commitments. In high school, she found mixed choirs were "fun and lighthearted," while women's choirs could be "cliquey" (Interview 2/4/2021) and filled with drama, so she had reservations about singing in the LU women's choir. Olivia values the women's choir for focusing on women's issues and engaging in difficult conversations, but she

has reservations about gendered ensembles and whether trans and gender-expansive students feel welcome in the choir.

Morgan [she/her/hers]

Morgan is a second-year music therapy and women and gender studies student with a psychology minor at Lowell University. She has sung in choir and played euphonium in band since high school. Her LU academic advisor told her not to sing in choir her first year in college because of her course load, but now that she is singing in the women's choir, she is grateful to be singing again and regrets not having that community in her first year in college. Morgan describes the women's choir as "a very empowering space" and that "it feels less like a class and more like a community" (Interview, 2/4/2021). As someone who cares deeply about social justice issues, Morgan was grateful for Megan's actionable leadership and dedication to creating inclusive spaces for trans and gender-expansive singers.

Chris and the Men's Choir Singers

Chris [he/him/his]

Chris is a white, cisgender male in his 40s who teaches conducting and the men's choir at Dawson State University (DSU). As Chris entered adolescence, his number one priority was "being cool and popular" (Interview, 11/9/2020). For him, this meant not singing, which "was never perceived, in my day, as a cool thing to do" (Interview, 11/9/2020). Although he initially resisted the choir teacher's recruitment efforts, he joined and found a love of choir after the choir teacher made an ensemble specifically for him and his male friends. Chris describes his initial experiences in singing as the ones that helped foster a lifelong love of tenor-bass choirs.

As a conductor, Chris prioritizes using music as a tool for social justice. He is keenly aware of cisheteronormative perspectives present in choral music, particularly in men's choirs.

As such, he goes out of his way to use men's choir as a means for "softening the underbelly of your typical college male," (Interview, 11/9/2020), by programming music and initiating discussions that challenge negative stereotypes associated with masculinity. Because the DSU men's choir is one of the oldest student organizations on campus, Chris acknowledges the complicated nature that history and the organization's alumni play into the organization, especially with regards to inclusion. Additionally, the men's choir is also a student organization, and he respects the leadership role the students have in the choir. Chris began this project with a dedication to creating an ensemble that was explicitly inclusive to trans and gender-expansive singers.

Jimmy [he/him/his]

Jimmy is a Vietnamese, gay fourth-year Business Administration major with a minor in music at Dawson State University. Growing up in a "little hick town," Jimmy was the only Asian student in his high school and did not disclose his sexuality until college. Jimmy specifically credits the men's choir at DSU for creating a space in which he felt safe to disclose his sexuality and knew he would be welcomed by his peers. As a member of the choir's board, Jimmy helped found the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Team, which he now chairs, after the choir sought to address its "large history of xenophobia, racism, [and] sexism" (Interview, 2/22/2021). As the chair, Jimmy has struggled with some of the historical elements of the organization. Jimmy finds value in singing in a men's choir and having a community that is so accepting to the LGBTQ community, which is reflected in its membership, and wants to find a way to be more inclusive of trans and gender-expansive singers while preserving the community he has valued in a men's space.

Matthew [he/him/his]

Matthew is a fourth-year engineering student and president of the DSU men's choir. Growing up, Matthew was heavily involved in the performing arts because his sisters "were my role models" and he "loved doing whatever my sisters were doing" (2/18/2021) He recalls music not being among the socially typical things for boys growing up but continued to sing anyway. In an effort to get more boys to sing, his choir program had an introductory men's choir and an a cappella men's choir to encourage male singers to join choir. After coming to DSU, he was drawn to sing in the men's choir because having such a large group of men singing together was "a really foreign concept to me" and "really, really inspiring" (Interview, 2/18/2021). Matthew has gained a lot musically and socially from the community of the men's choir, and Chris's focus on vulnerability within the men's choir "was really transformative for me as a person" (Interview, 2/18/2021). Matthew brought particular insight about the men's choir's relationship with the alumni organization and the developing relationship between the men's and women's choirs at the university.

Daniel [he/him/his]

Daniel is a straight, cisgender man in his third academic year at DSU, studies English Language and Literature, and sings in the men's choir. For the first two years of college, Daniel was a business major, but he took the past academic year off. As someone who has "struggled with mental health in the past" (Interview, 2/18/2021), Daniel valued Chris's honesty and vulnerability with regards to mental health. Growing up, Daniel was "teased somewhat relentlessly for being a part of choir and theater and sort of just being more flamboyant" (February 18, 2021) and found there was a lot of tension between male and female singers in his high school's choir program. For him, the most meaningful musical experiences of his life have

taken place in the context of men's choirs. Daniel is particularly interested in gender and masculinity ("I think that in another, more courageous, lifetime I may have been a Women, Gender, and Sexuality major" [Email correspondence, 2/17/2021]) and sees men's spaces as a way for men to learn how to use their privilege and be better allies to minoritized populations. Although he feels the men's choir is internally inclusive, he knows there is a lot of gendered language and assumptions around gender because the group identifies as a men's choir.

Transition to Participant Chapters

The participant descriptions above provide an initial insight to the backgrounds and mindsets of the participants leading into the study. In the next four chapters, I take a closer look at Megan and Chris as individuals, their journeys to becoming choral conductors, the ways in which they feel successful in creating gender-inclusive spaces, and the ways in which they struggle. In chapters 4 and 6, I focus on Megan and Chris's musical upbringings and what brought them to their current universities. In chapter 5, I outline the project that Megan underwent with the women's choir students as they looked at the gendered aspects of their women's choir as they determined actions they could take to be more inclusive to trans and gender expansive singers. In chapter 7, I discuss the ways in which Chris and the men's choir singers feel they have been successful in creating inclusive spaces, areas in which they feel there is room for growth, and some of the internal and external elements that complicate their inclusion efforts. In chapter 8, I discuss themes present for both participants, and in chapter 9, I discuss implications and my recommendations as a result of this study.

CHAPTER 4: MEGAN HARRIS: UPBRINGING, MUSICAL JOURNEY, AND THE LOWELL UNIVERSITY WOMEN’S CHOIR

Megan is a white woman in her 30s. During this project, she taught choral conducting and taught the women’s choir at Lowell University. This chapter will introduce you to Megan Harris and will explore the ways in which gender influenced her personal, educational, and professional lives. I will also detail the events that led up to Megan working at Lowell University and the concerted efforts she made to shift attitudes about the women’s choir at her university, as well as her philosophy for selecting repertoire that fosters meaningful discussions.

Throughout the next two chapters, I will share the perspectives of a number of the women’s choir singers throughout the choir’s discussions. Three students—Olivia, Morgan, and Michael—participated in individual interviews and provided additional insight to Megan as a professor, as well as into the choir’s exploration of gender inclusion. Olivia is a white, cisgender woman in her first year of music therapy school at Lowell University; Morgan is a second-year student at Lowell University and is double majoring in music therapy as well as women and gender studies; and Michael is a second-year music therapy student who sings in the women’s choir and has not disclosed his gender identity status to Megan or the other members of the ensemble.

Megan Harris

“Jessica!”

There’s something special about the way Megan says my name. It reminds me of the way my mom greets me every time I come home to visit—enveloped with genuine adoration and sealed with a warm embrace. I rarely hear anyone say my name anymore. My life has been especially quiet this year during the pandemic. Not without struggle, but physically quiet. It’s

been eight months since I've sung with others. Almost a year since I've seen my family. Most days, I sit in my office, occasionally accompanied by my sleeping dog, with very little human interaction throughout the day. My conversations with Megan have become one of the few things I get to look forward to in a year of increasing isolation.

“Jessica!” As she says my name, she leans toward her camera and beams. She's been on Zoom all day with school and meetings, and yet she still has the presence and grace to make me feel—make me know—that she's been eagerly waiting to see me all day. My background is sterile and white because it's the only space in my office that I've bothered to keep clean this year. Her office has a wall lined with books and picture frames, another with diplomas, and a window with pale curtains to filter in the natural light. Some people have curated their backgrounds for Zoom, but knowing Megan, I'm sure everything in her office was orderly and well-designed long before we all considered the implications of teaching virtually.

At the beginning of each of our interviews, Megan has prioritized me as an individual. “How is Conlin doing? Have the cases gone down at his work?” My husband is a physical therapist in a skilled nursing facility. She knows I've been anxious about him working with such a vulnerable population during the pandemic. She always checks in with me about school, the progress of my dissertation, what podcasts I've been listening to, how the job hunt has been going, and the latest things I've been cooking and baking. Like many people during the pandemic, we've baked our fair share of bread this year. She recently showed me a picture of her bread and was quick to thank me for sharing a new technique and brand of flour I've just tried out.

In an interview that is meant to get to know Megan better as a teacher, musician, and individual, she always takes time to get to know me better, too. That's just the sort of person

Megan is—someone that makes you know there's at least one person whose world may be a little brighter because you are in it. (Field note, December 2020)

Background

Upbringing

Megan was raised in a Catholic family and attended a small, K-12 Catholic private school. Growing up in a small Midwest town, Megan has been doing music her whole life. “I did a *lot* of music growing up” (Interview, 11/10/2020), she recalled—community theater, musicals, church, and school. The music program at school was small, but she experienced a variety of mixed and single-gender ensembles. Some choral programs have an ensemble hierarchy related to an audition process. Her high school’s choir program was structured according to grade and voice type: freshman mixed choir, sophomore women’s choir, a mixed concert choir, and a show choir, which was “the only ensemble, so membership felt really special” (Interview, 11/10/2020).

In our conversations about gender in choral ensembles, Megan and I have talked about choral programs’ hierarchies and how the structure of the program is often related to gender. I was curious if Megan had those kinds of thoughts as a student:

I was reflecting on it—you know, how did I think about it, what did I feel about it? I have really no memory because it was mostly non-auditioned. It was just the way it was. And I can't even tell you the repertoire that we sang. I have no attachment or feelings. It was hard to even recall the specific ensemble breakdowns. No feeling toward any of it, other than, “I liked singing in high school.” (Interview, 11/10/2020)

Although some schools’ have an ensemble hierarchy determined by an audition process, others advance singers through ensembles based on grade level and voice type (e.g., 6th grade treble choir and 7th/8th grade mixed choir). Megan’s choral experience in high school was largely not

auditioned-based. In programs that are audition-based, the most elite ensemble tends to be mixed ensembles, which can leave female and treble singers disproportionately competing for membership in the top ensemble as compared to their male and tenor-bass peers (O’Toole, 1998).

Gender is at the heart of Megan’s experience as a professional choral conductor, but as a K-12 student in a Catholic School in the 1990s and 2000s, “those conversations were not happening. It just wouldn’t have been a thing” (Interview, 11/10/2020). Although the conversations weren’t explicitly happening, she and her peers could see how gender impacted the choral program:

In high school, it was so clear that the director recruited for boys. The musicals always starred the good male singers with a female supporting role. So that was clear—and clear to me back in high school. Clear to others in high school. (Interview, 11/10/2020)

A number of choral texts specifically address recruiting for male singers (Barham, 2001; Reed, 2008; Trott, 2020), but little focus is given to the recruitment of female and treble singers. Palkki (2015) called for teacher-conductors to reconsider recruitment techniques with particular focus on their relation to gender.

Student in Higher Education

Megan attended a small, private liberal arts school for her undergrad. She continued to be a part of choir programs that were not engaging in discussions surrounding gender or any number of identities:

The gender conversations we’re having today were not on my radar until grad school, or maybe even later. In undergrad—again, smaller school—all of the ensembles were mixed. It was an auditioned, mixed chamber group and an auditioned, mixed large

ensemble, and a community choir, mixed. And that was it. And so I never had those experiences. (Interview, 11/10/2020)

Beyond recruitment in high school, Megan did not spend a lot of time considering gender as it related to choir. It is difficult to know the exact reason why she did not think about it. It could be because she had a strong sense of self-worth and did not consider that her gender would play into her experiences as a singer. Another possibility is that gender may have been an integral part of her experience but she was unaware because gender was not a part of the discourse. I have found this to be true to my personal experience. I only started examining the intersection of gender and music in my undergraduate. After realizing that many of my negative experiences in music were related to gender, I began analyzing the ways in which I could actively address those same things in my own teaching. For Megan, she only began addressing singers' gender identities once it became apparent to her that their experiences in a gendered ensemble were impacting the quality of their choral experience, both musically and socially.

Gender and Choir

While pursuing her master's in choral conducting, the choir program was again centered around mixed ensembles. When I asked her about the intersection of gender and choir during her master's program, she said, "You know, honestly, Jessica, I had not reflected on those moments until reading these questions" (Interview, 11/10/2020). The only time she participated in a women's choir was in the small moments when the greater concert program required a treble ensemble, at which point the women of the mixed ensemble would break off and rehearse on their own:

I have not thought about those specific two or three treble ensemble experiences—which, it wasn't an ensemble. It was a group pulled from the large ensemble for a specific piece.

Those were two *really small* moments, and they felt different than all the other experiences. And by different, I mean the people in the ensemble—who *had* to be there. This was not an auditioned ensemble. You were in it as part of your degree program. And they were great experiences, but some people were there because it was required. There was a vibe from some of the students that was like, “This is less important.” And looking back on it, that sort of blows my mind. Because although I was aware of that sentiment, I wasn't appalled by it. (Interview, 11/10/2020)

Megan thought back on the negative attitudes of singers in the pull-out women's choir:

I'm just mad because I wasn't mad about it, you know? As I reflect, I know there was some negativity around those treble ensemble pieces, and although I wasn't engaging in those conversations, I didn't defend the experience either. I was also a different person then, overwhelmed in my own world at the time—I wasn't going to be that person in *any* conversation of that nature during those years. (Interview, 11/10/2020)

The previous quotes are an example of what many people have likely experienced in recognizing instances in which they may have been imperfect allies. Megan's reflection demonstrates the importance of creating relationships with students that allow them to advocate for themselves and others when classroom policies have negative impacts on the wellbeing of others.

Although Megan recognized the negative perception of women's choirs throughout her time as a singer and a conductor, she is optimistic that attitudes about women's choirs have changed since she was in grad school:

Megan: I would love to think that, if going back to those experiences now, that vibe would be different. I have to think it would be. If I was doing that same thing in 2020, the level of respect for the music being made would be higher and that similar level of

commitment displayed for the mixed ensembles would have been there for the treble experiences, as well. I just, I *have* to think that. And you know, I don't know if it was just a sign of the time, or sometimes it's just the people, right? You get a couple of people, strong voices and strong faces in a group that can set a tone. And if those voices or faces weren't there then, maybe it would have been different.

Jessica: Do you think that shift would have been led by the directors? Do you think the culture of gender has changed societally, specific to music?

Megan: I think so. A lot has changed and evolved and improved in just 10 years—even just in *five* years. (Interview, 11/10/2020)

Music education scholars Gould (1992), Koza (1992, 1993, 1993-1994), Lamb (1994, 1996), and O'Toole (1994, 1998) were the first scholars in the field to consider gender in music through a feminist lens. Megan's comments mirror a wave of recent researchers that recognize how intertwined gender is in music education (Bartolome, 2013, 2016; Elorriaga, 2011; Freer, 2016, 2018; McBride & Palkki, 2020; Nichols, 2013; Palkki, 2015, 2017, 2020; Palkki & Sauerland, 2019; Parker, 2018; Silveira & Goff, Sweet, 2015, 2016, 2018).

Gender of Conductors and Teachers

In Megan's undergraduate and master's, all of her ensemble conductors were male. During the women's choir pull-outs, she sang under a female conductor for the first time in her collegiate career. Although Megan saw having a female conductor as a meaningful part of her professional journey, she said, "I don't think I realized the important of that experience until after the fact" (Interview, 11/10/2021). Women have historically been underrepresented in the field of conducting (Cape & Nichols, 2012; Gould, 2005a; Grant, 2000). This is especially true in higher education (Music Educators National Conference, 2021), as illustrated by Megan's experiences.

Gould (2005a) noted that this often leaves women without female role models if they aspire to have careers in fields in which women are underrepresented, such as composing, instrument performance, and conducting). If a woman wanted to pursue conducting but only had male teachers and role models, she may feel the need to conform to traditionally masculine ideals in her conducting and teaching if she perceives them to be characteristics that are desirable or necessary to find success (Bartleet, 2008a, 2008b).

Professional Journey

When Megan began her master's, working at a university didn't even cross her mind as a potential career path:

It wasn't until my experience Lowell University that I realized that I wanted to conduct and teach at a college or university. Up until that point, after I had graduated from my master's program, I didn't anticipate working with collegiate ensembles. (Interview, 11/10/2020)

She anticipated that she would work as a church musician and direct community choirs. It wasn't until Megan applied to and accepted a job at Lowell University that she realized, "*Oh... I really, really, love this*" (Interview, 11/10/2020). At the time that she was hired at Lowell University, her conceptions of women's choirs were still incredibly new. It was around this time that she saw a transformative performance by a professional women's choir:

From beginning to end that performance was impactful - the repertoire, the quality of music-making, the individual singers, the conductor... and I was like, "This is a world that I did not know existed. Period." I was unaware. I was like, "Okay, this is incredible and something I've never experienced," and, on a much different scale, it's what I was wanting to give to Lowell University's Women's Choir in terms of quality of repertoire,

variety of programming, and concert experience. But it was on a totally different scale.

(Interview, 11/10/2020)

This performance was a pivotal moment for Megan, both as a conductor and as a musician. As a conductor, she was inspired by a women's choir's powerful performance in a world that often undervalues or devalues the literal and figurative voices of women inside and outside music.

Because Megan had limited experiences singing in women's choirs, she used this choir as a model for the type of experience she would have wanted as a singer in a women's choir.

Megan, who identifies as a feminist, latched on to the choir's themes of female empowerment and quality music-making for women in music. "At the concert, I was like (excited), "*Yes, women! Oh my gosh.*" This is a group of incredibly smart and excellent female music makers—music makers who are female, seemingly." (Interview, 11/10/2020) This was the first allusion Megan gave during this study that perhaps not every woman in a women's choir identifies as a woman, and that we perceive the singers as women, rather than them seeing themselves as women. This theme will be one that is present throughout the remaining chapters in this dissertation and will act as a reminder that a singer's internal sense of gender (i.e., gender identity) may be incongruent with their external expression of gender in the form of clothing, hairstyle, speech, or singing voice.

Lowell University

Ensemble Hierarchy and Program Logistics

At Lowell University, students can earn degrees in music, instrumental and vocal performance, and music therapy, though most music majors are enrolled in the music therapy program. The choir program is made up of two choirs: an auditioned mixed ensemble and the non-auditioned women's choir. Megan is the conductor of the women's choir, and the director of

choral activities conducts the auditioned mixed ensemble. She and the director of choral activities have made a concerted effort over to make connections between the ensembles:

In terms of how they're viewed, one's *non*-auditioned and one *is* auditioned, but there is a growing sense of community that the director of choral activities and I and the two choir boards have cultivated, to have the ensembles know one another and function as a choral department rather than two separate entities. (Interview, 11/10/2020)

Some choir programs may be based on a structure made up of individual ensembles. The choir program at Lowell University is seeking to have a through-thread in their choral department that is based not only on shared musical goals, but also social goals. This philosophy is aligned with O'Toole's (1998) recommendations for creating deep and meaningful experiences for all students in a choral program, regardless of the choir in which a student sings.

Male Singers, Tenors, and Basses

Previously, there was a men's choir on campus, but over time, the numbers have dwindled. A community men's choir had affiliations with the university and held their rehearsals on campus, so tenors and basses at the university could sing in that ensemble, "but as of this year, that's not an option" (Interview, 11/10/2020) because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Although there was a pattern of decline in enrollment for the men's choir, Megan believes the pandemic forced the scaled back offerings for tenors and basses. If a tenor or bass wanted to sing in the choir at Lowell University, then they would sing in the auditioned and mixed LU Choir.

Presumably after the pandemic, they also could continue to sing in the community men's chorus on the weekends, but as one student pointed out, "it's with men of various ages, so it's not a college experience as much as it is a choral experience" (Group Discussion, 11/9/2020). Other students noted that there are also a cappella groups on campus, but that they are student-led,

focus on popular music rather than choral music, and can't be taken for credit. Megan made it clear that it was not a perfect scenario for cis male singers or people who sing tenor and bass. "It's not a great solution, but it was *a* solution that needed to be provided until we can figure out what's next" (Interview, 11/10/2020).

Like many choral programs, the mixed ensemble is the top ensemble at Lowell University. Because music majors are required to enroll in an ensemble while they are pursuing their degree, I wondered how the structure of the choral program impacted male singers' ability to sing, especially if their only current option was the mixed, auditioned ensemble. When I asked Megan where a music major who is male or sings tenor and bass would go if they didn't make it into the auditioned mixed ensemble, she said that is not an issue that she has encountered at her university. "The reality is, if you're invited into the program as a tenor or bass, it's likely you will be placed into the LU Choir" (Interview, 12/7/2020). In 1998, O'Toole stated that female singers outnumber male singers in choir programs as much as three to one. Recently, Elpus & Abril (2019) found similar enrollment proportions, with female singers making up 70% of choir programs, meaning that the gender divide has remained the same for at least 20 years.⁴ In choral programs where the top ensemble is a mixed choir, O'Toole argued that such program structures have normalized male singers not having to compete as much as their female counterparts for a spot in select ensembles. At Lowell University, an additional layer of complication is that tenors, basses, and singers who present as male are thus required to enroll in a course that requires more class time, as well as fees related to things such as tours, in order to obtain the credits necessary to complete their music degree. For non-music majors, because the course is longer, they are also

⁴ Neither O'Toole (1998) nor Elpus & Abril (2019) had access to data that delineated beyond male or female singers. There is still much work to be done in survey data to allow for participants to accurately represent their gender.

more likely to have course conflicts outside of the music department that make it more difficult, if not impossible, for them to maintain enrollment in the ensemble.

Sopranos, Altos, and Singers Presenting as Women: “You are Pigeonholed into Women’s Choir.”

Some universities have tuition systems that cover all credits that are designated within the window of full-time enrollment (i.e., 12-16 credits). At Lowell University, students pay for each individual credit. “Because so many students are just paying outright for their degree, once they’ve fulfilled their ensemble requirements, it’s really hard for them to sign up again, financially” (Interview, 11/10/2020). Although many of the women’s choir students noted that they enjoy the community of the women’s ensemble, one student commented that she “originally only joined for the credit” (Interview, 2/4/2021).

A number of factors contribute to what choir students sing in, but for students who sing soprano, alto, or outwardly present as female, many may see women’s choir as the only option, regardless of their gender identity or ensemble preference:

I think it's really necessary that the director of choral activities and I do have the conversation regarding if you don't make the auditioned ensemble, or your schedule doesn't allow for it, but you need ensemble credit, you are pigeonholed into women's choir... And I think, of all the reasons, that's a pillar reason for me. (Interview, 11/10/2020)

Teacher-conductors have a number of things to take into consideration with regards to inclusion in their choral programs. Depending on ensemble hierarchy and the types of ensembles offered, trans and gender-expansive singers may either have limited options for enrolling in choir, or they may feel the need to enroll in an ensemble that does not align with their gender identity or voice

type. At universities that require music majors to enroll in ensembles for credit, teacher-conductors must take particular care to ensure that trans and gender-expansive singers have an ensemble that allows them to feel accepted for their gender identity and expression.

Working with Trans and Gender-Expansive Singers

Prior to the 2020-2021 school year, she has had two students who were openly trans or gender expansive at Lowell University. The first singer who she discussed was a trans woman:

Megan: She was a baritone, a non-music major, and interested in voice lessons. She wanted to work on falsetto and developing that head voice. And so she took lessons once a week in addition to choir. And for me, all I was thinking was, “Just keep her singing healthily.” I wasn’t trained in how to teach trans singers. But I thought of it like a changing voice and helping them expand the range. And she was super happy with it and was comfortable trying things. And if during rehearsal something wasn't working for her, she would debrief in her lessons. All she wanted to do was get better and was *thrilled* that that was her space.

Jessica: *Because* it was a woman’s space?

Megan: I think so, yeah. I think she had been a trans woman for maybe a year or two and had worked *so* meticulously on the physical appearance of what that meant to her. And so for her to feel *normal* in that space—which I think she did—I think that was a big checkbox for her. It was kind her first foot in the water of being in a feminine space. Some didn’t have *any* clue one way or another, and for her, that was *thrilling* and really gratifying. So then the next step for her was, “Okay, how can I sing with this ensemble and actually contribute and have a voice that works in this space?” And sometimes it worked, and sometimes she was like, “I just didn't sing that part because I could only sing

the octave down, and it was very obvious.” And I would tell her, “Honestly, whatever makes you happy and comfortable. We'll just keep working in voice lessons and helping you work towards your goals.” (Interview, 11/17/2020)

The flexibility that Megan demonstrated for the trans female singer is similar to normalized practices in middle school choirs. Music educators advocate for techniques such as revoicing pre-existing music (Napoles, 2012) or adding a descant or ostinato if the present parts may not fit the students' range (Bowers, 2011). Teacher-conductors can employ similar strategies with trans and gender-expansive singers who are going through a voice change or who are exploring unfamiliar parts of their vocal range.

The other singer she recalled was a student who came out during their time in the women's choir:

We had someone in women's choir who was assigned female at birth, and in that semester was like, “Yeah, I don't think I identify as female.” But wanted to stay in women's choir. I think community and friends and familiarity were important to them, but they wanted to sing lower and lower. This person was a music major, and from an education standpoint, I was like, “That's fine, but if you're going to teach, you want to be able to sing a range of sounds, and I don't want you to damage your speaking or singing voice.” I didn't quite know what to do there. That person was an alto with a relatively lower voice, but I never quite knew what was right in that case. (Interview, 11/17/2020)

One of the things I value most about Megan's perspective is her willingness to reflect on her pedagogy and acknowledge both when she feels she fell short and when she struggled to know what was right to do in any given situation. With regard to trans and gender-expansive singers, there is very little research on vocal pedagogy techniques. Sauerland (2018) researched trans and

nonbinary singers and their experiences in a voice studio. Although the dissertation did not provide specific vocal pedagogy techniques, it emphasized the role that gender has in relation to the study of voice and that voice teachers should implement a student-centered approach to their teaching. I advocate for teacher-conductors to implement a student-centered approach and allow the student to make the decisions that made the most sense for their short- and long-term musical and social goals.

Megan recalled how her language has evolved over the years to consider trans and gender-expansive singers:

Since conducting the LU Women’s Choir, I’ve said from day one: “sopranos,” “altos,” “singers,” “students,” “humans.” Saying “ladies” or “women” has never been a part of my verbiage, in or outside of choir. I know for *some* that’s a hard transition, to rephrase “hey, gentleman” or “hey, women, sing this part.” So I *hope*, for the past several years now, students have heard me call them “altos,” “sopranos,” “singers.” (Interview, 11/17/2020)

Megan’s move away from gendered language and toward more gender-neutral approaches is an example of a cultural shift within music education to create environments that are more inclusive to a variety of gender identities.

“That Sentiment’s Not Going to Work for Me”: The Evolution of Lowell University’s Women’s Choir

When Megan got to Lowell University, it became apparent that there was a negative association with singing in the women’s choir:

Historically, it was the non-auditioned choir that either you had to take to complete your degree, or that you sang in because you didn’t get into LU Choir. I think the overall vibe,

was inherently, “I didn't make it into this choir, and so this is the one I'm in now.” I was like, “*Yeahhhh, that sentiment's not going to work for me.*” And it really shouldn't work for anyone in this choir. (Interview, 11/10/2020)

Once she understood the singers' unfavorable view of the women's choir, she was determined to make a change to the overall musical mission of the ensemble:

When I first started with the women's choir, I was committed to singing quality repertoire, building music literacy, and evolving into a higher quality ensemble, in terms of music-making. That was a pretty big goal of mine, and for the choral department. Let's get the balance of the LU Choir and Women's Choir, not level—because the timing is so different and makeup so different—but just a little bit closer so that when we collaborate and are in concerts together, it's not as clear what's going on, you know? So when I started, that was a big goal. And then, of course, as I actually got in front of the people and met the individual faces and saw what was needed in terms of a non-musical experience—also then became passionate about both pillars of high-quality music-making and “Let's talk. Let's have some conversations, and let's program with the discussion that's needed in mind.” (Interview, 11/10/2020)

Ensemble hierarchy continued—and continues—to play into students' perceptions of the women's choir. Rather than choosing to not talk about it, like her choir teachers before her, she made a concerted effort to not only acknowledge the impacts of gender on the ensemble and choir program, but embrace them through messaging, literature selection, and facilitating difficult conversations within the ensemble.

Megan knew the negative associations surrounding the women's choir were directly related to gender. Initially, she focused on making musical changes to elevate the status of the

ensemble, but as she grew to know the students, it became clear that she needed to focus on the relationships within the ensemble, as well:

When starting to conduct the women's choir, it was just a name for me. Those first semesters were about, “Quality. Quality. Quality. Music literacy. Build good vocal health, choral sound, recruit for anyone who wants to be here. Let's sing great repertoire and do it to the best of our ability. *And* it just so happens, like, yeah, I guess this is a women's choir.” And then that lens shifted a little bit as I learned more about the singers and they learned more about me. (Interview, 11/17/2020)

Over the course of this project, it became clear that making deep connections through music has become a central tenet to the mission of the women’s choir at Lowell University and that students see it as one of the most meaningful parts of the women’s choir experience. Megan talked about the evolution of that purpose since she began at Lowell University:

I don't know students would have come up with that in my first two or three semesters with the group. It could have been the opposite wording—which I don’t know is good or bad—just something to think about in my own evolution of how I've thought about the ensemble. (Interview, 11/10/2020)

Megan’s experiences with women’s choirs largely have been contained in the past five years in her experiences as a choir conductor. Although she did not previously examine gender as a contributing factor to choir culture, it became readily apparent that it was an essential element to address in her women’s choir. By listening to students and responding to their frustrations and concerns, Megan has made noticeable changes not only to her women’s choir, but the structure and culture of the greater choir program at Lowell University.

Shifting Attitudes About the Women's Choir

Over the years, Megan has noticed a cultural change within the greater choral department about involvement in women's choir. She has started noticing that there are students that continue to sing in the women's choir while they sing in the auditioned mixed ensemble, which would have been unheard of before she joined the faculty at Lowell University. She cites this as a huge shift in the attitudes about women's choir. Another example of the shifting attitudes surrounding the women's choir is noticing that some students are electing to sing in the women's choir:

There's a segment of students who are in women's choir who *want* to be in women's choir. One, because they like it, but two, it's far less of a time commitment, and it fulfills their degree requirements. (Interview, 11/10/2020)

The financial commitment is also a contributing factor for some students given that the LU choir has additional uniform requirements and choir tours. Olivia is a prime example of how the logistics of class scheduling plays into the type of ensembles in which students can participate. "I originally wanted to be a part of the LU Choir, and I was very disappointed that it didn't fit into my schedule. My eight classes just didn't really leave room at the one time" (Interview, 2/4/2021).

Morgan also had scheduling conflicts that limited her involvement in choir. When Morgan met with her advisor freshman year, she wanted to register for the women's choir but felt dismissed by her advisors because she was already taking 15 credits. "And here I am, with 19 credits this semester, and I'm doing choir. I really wish I had done it my first year because having that year off, I had missed how much I love singing, especially in a group" (Interview, 2/4/2021). Although gender is a contributing factor to ensemble hierarchy and recruitment,

teacher-conductors must also consider the logistics of degree programs that impact students' ability to register for ensembles.

When addressing issues of gender inequity in the choir program at Lowell University, Megan inadvertently also addressed other inequities. In shifting negative attitudes about singing in a women's choir, Megan has supported students in having flexibility in their schedule for course, work, or personal conflicts, both in terms of the specific time that the LU Choir and women's choir meet, as well as the number of hours that they meet.

Uniforms

As conductors consider the ways in which choir and gender intersect, uniforms are one of the prominent elements that are gendered:

When I first started, the singers wore dresses with pearls. And after the first year, I was like, "I'd like to share with you what concert black means in the professional music world. And I want to know if you're interested in shifting to a concert black attire." And some people were like, "I don't really mind the dresses, but concert black sounds cool." And others were like, "Yes, I hate these dresses." We've worn concert black for a few years now—and it has its pros and cons. Concert black, for me originally, was not so much in response to gender, but more so in response to the financial strain it can have on students. It's just expensive, and I would rather them spend money on a less expensive black blazer that's going to serve them for an interview at some point than an archaic concert dress with pearls. Get yourself an *awesome* blazer, and then wear it to concerts. (Interview, 11/17/2020)

Although Megan's decision was not originally made on the basis of gender, it was another contributing factor to creating an environment that is more open to trans and gender-expansive

singers. Scholars such as Palkki (2016, 2017) and Silveira (2019) have highlighted the important role that uniforms plays in gender expression and have argued for teacher-conductors to consider how their ensembles' uniforms may impact their trans and gender-expansive singers.

Programing Music: "Open the Door to a Challenging Conversation."

Over the course of her career, Megan has conducted both mixed and treble ensembles. When selecting repertoire there are a number of shared elements that she looks for when programming for a concert. Where the differences lie are the feminist-centric nature of conversations that take place within the ensemble. She often also considers the balance of selecting music based on musical merit as well as deeper textual meaning:

Megan: If you're looking at a program that I've put together for a mixed ensemble and a women's ensemble, I think you're going to find more similarities than differences in terms of text, instrumentation, maybe complexity, composer demographic. Where the differences lie, I think, with some of the treble repertoire, I will build in things that lend themselves to a conversation of that experience. But not to say with mixed ensembles am I not building and repertoire that's going to help me establish conversations that I want to have. Maybe not rooted in feminism, but I'll pick repertoire that I know is going to open the door to a challenging conversation or an important conversation that I want to highlight in this semester.

Jessica: And that's for the mixed ensemble, or the treble ensemble, or both?

Megan: Both. With the treble ensemble, more often than not, that will be a little more like feminist-leaning conversation. With a mixed ensemble, it *could* be that, but it also could be any number of things. But I think there are more similarities than differences when I'm programming for any ensemble.

Jessica: But perhaps some of the conversations you're having are different *because* you direct a women's choir? Do you feel like those conversations would be different if you were conducting a choir that specifically was a treble ensemble that took some that gendered nature way?

Megan: Yeah, that's a really great question. I don't know. That gets me thinking about how the makeup might change—which is fine—and then deciding, is there still a place for conversations surrounding the female experience. And I *think* where I stand right now, which is ever-changing, is that I would—(interrupts herself) I'm kind of contradicting myself, because I've programmed music for a mixed ensemble that highlights women's issues. And so I think those are going to find themselves in my current programming anywhere. But I'm sure if we did change the makeup, then that would evolve as well, you know? (Interview, 11/17/2020)

When Megan alluded to a potential change in the ensemble's structure, she was alluding to the deep dive she and the women's choir students did in Fall 2020 and Spring 2021 as they considered inclusion as it relates to traditionally single-gender ensembles (i.e., women's and men's choirs). Megan and the students discussed the environment of the ensemble, its membership, if women's choirs can be inclusive of trans and gender-expansive singers, and, as Megan referenced above, the type of repertoire she programs for the ensemble. The work she did with her women's choir will be the center of the discussion in Chapter 5.

As Megan considered difficult conversations, she also wanted to make sure that singers feel that they are getting a quality musical experience, as well. For her, quality music is at the center of all of her work as a conductor and educator:

It sort of dawned on me the other day: what if someone's thinking, “Gosh, this is like *so warm and fuzzy*, and we're talking about our *feelings* and how we *feel*.” And especially because of COVID, we've done so little singing. And if anyone were to say to me, “Gosh, this space is just so loving. We never get to good music-making,” that's the antithesis of what I would, at the start, want anyone to say about an ensemble that I'm working with, you know? I feel really strongly about doing what we do well. And whatever well means for our group in that semester, that's what I want it to be. And so it's an interesting balance where, especially in the past two semesters or so, there's sort of a pendulum, an ebb and flow of what is preferred, and what is prioritized, and I think it's *great* and interesting to note, and I'm curious if anyone is feeling that way. I hope not. (Interview, 11/17/2020)

As an educator, Megan prioritizes selecting music that allows for the choir to discuss difficult topics. Megan acknowledges that in order for singers to connect with the piece, however, she must come to understand the singers, which in turn influences her repertoire selection. Megan's philosophy is student-centered and prioritizes students' experiences and perspectives.

Lowell University's Women's Choir from the Students' Perspectives

Professor Harris. As I talked individually with the students about their experiences with Megan, many of their faces lit up, eager to sing the praises of their choir conductor. Because Olivia is a first-year student at Lowell University, her interactions with Megan as a professor have largely taken place over Zoom. Olivia noted that when they do breakout rooms in women's choir, “It was the first breakout room that I've been in that wasn't completely awkward waiting for somebody to speak” (Interview, 2/4/2021). She credits the environment of women's choir—even online—to Megan. “She is very welcoming and open to everyone. And she's just so nice.

She could have a conversation like she's your friend, but then she can also just lead us. I love her” (Interview, 2/4/2021).

Morgan spoke more to the type of ensemble that Megan has been able to foster during a global pandemic:

She’s such an amazing person. I have never really interacted with her that much in person just because, again, with COVID, we don't get to see each other face to face. But when she's on Zoom, she's always so active and so passionate about teaching, and she just finds ways to get us smiling again. Because after a long day of Zoom classes, we're all exhausted, and I know she's just like, “*O-kay!* Let's stand up! And let’s pat our heads! And do all these dance moves and stuff to get us moving again.” And I know I always get a smile on my face after that. So I think she's just incredible to be able to do that.

(Interview, 2/4/2021)

Morgan is double majoring in music therapy and women and gender studies. As someone who cares about social justice issues, Morgan is inspired by Megan’s dedication to inclusivity in the choral ensemble:

And the fact that this has been an interest of hers, the fact that that's always been a passion of hers is really just incredible to me, because it also tells me that the educators of tomorrow—and I guess today—really want to see changes made that should have been made a long time ago. And it just makes me really, really happy and hopeful for the future. (Interview, 2/4/2021)

As I’ve watched Megan work with the women’s choir students, I’ve seen Olivia and Morgan’s perceptions reflected in Megan’s pedagogy. She always addresses students by name. She is a

master at engaging with students over the chat function in Zoom, responding in real-time, and making every student's voice an equal participant in the choral dynamic.

The Music Program at Lowell University. Olivia knew she wanted to go out of her home state for college to pursue a degree in music therapy. When she came to Lowell University, for a school visit as a high schooler, "I was waiting for something to go wrong, but it was just so friendly and welcoming" (Interview, 2/4/2021). Coming from a large high school music program, she was aware of how competitive music programs can be, especially when in performing ensembles. "It is such a rarity for drama to be so absent in competitive fields like music," she remarked, but after getting to know the music therapy program at Lowell University, it became clear to her that "people won't push you off the stage to get a solo," (Interview, 2/4/2021) which was an important factor in her attending Lowell University.

In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, school has been a learning experience for Olivia. In 2020 and 2021, Megan and the women's choir students have experienced what many people across the United States have faced: virtual working and learning during the pandemic, high hopes of returning to in-person activities, and having their hopes dashed when the state, county, or city's COVID-19 positivity rates remained too high for in-person activity. Because Olivia is a freshman, this situation is not new to her. "I mean, our senior year was kind of messed up, and now we're going into our freshman year, and it's also kind of messed up" (Interview, 2/4/2021). Although choir is "weird with COVID" (Interview, 2/4/2021), she has been pleasantly "surprised about the atmosphere," especially in light of choir largely taking place on a virtual platform.

Mixed versus Treble and Women's Choirs. Because the mixed ensemble (LU Choir) is the only auditioned choir at the university, Olivia was hopeful that she could take part in the auditioned ensemble. Like many music majors, Olivia has a heavy course load—8 classes—and

there was a course conflict during the LU Choir class time. Beyond the musical reasons, however, Olivia was eager to be a part of the mixed ensemble for social reasons:

Olivia: I think that I was mostly worried about the atmosphere being cliquy, because I know in the past when I'm not in a mixed choir, a lot of times it's very hard to fit in because there are so many different groups, and obviously everyone else would probably know each other—a lot better than I would know them—and so I was very nervous about that going in.

Jessica: When you talk about how you've experienced some cliquy-ness in choir, do you perceive that being directly related to gender?

Olivia: I think that when I'm in a mixed ensemble, there is a lot less of that. I think it's a lot more fun and lighthearted and, “Okay, we're here to sing! We're all in this together!” whereas when I'm in an ensemble where it is stereotypically females, in my experience, it is very cliquy—it might be okay for a little while, but then there will always be at least two big things that happen a semester. (Interview, 2/4/2021)

Olivia's experience is echoed in the work of Gauthier (2005). In a survey of singers at Gauthier's university, students were asked for their preference of ensemble type—female, male, or mixed choir—and their rationale. For female singers who preferred singing in a mixed choir, their rationales were often directly tied to why they didn't want to sing in a women's choir, including finding women's choir to be a “disappointing experience” (p. 43). Male respondents in the survey who preferred all-male choruses cited “a lack of emotional baggage in an all-male choir” (p. 44), implying that women are a source of drama in choral programs. Both Koza (1993a) and McBride and Palkki (2020) noted the pervasiveness of choral textbooks insisting that masculinity must be reinforced through singing. In a society that often defines masculinity through a

suppression of expressed emotions, it is not difficult for singers, teacher-conductors, and audiences to determine that anything that is not hyper-masculine must thus in contrast be laden with “emotional baggage.”

Despite Olivia’s initial hesitations with being in a women’s choir, she was pleasantly surprised with the eagerness of the students and the overall positive atmosphere in the women’s choir:

Olivia: I felt like I fit in right away, which was really, really cool, because I don't think I've ever had that experience, and I had no clue what Zoom would be like for choir. I don't know how they made any of it work, because I was kind of at a loss there, but they did! (Interview, 2/4/2021)

Empowerment and Community. In high school, Morgan sang in a mixed choir, but the program was small, and most of the choir was made up of female singers. “The arts at my school weren’t very appreciated, and it was really underfunded,” Morgan opined. “People thought it was a joke, so a lot of the guys never really joined.” (Interview, 2/4/2021). Comparing O’Toole (1998) and Elpus’s (2015) articles implies that enrollment in choral programs on the basis of gender has largely remained constant for at least 25 years.

Morgan described her high school choral experience as “just very music-centered. We never had conversations of who might feel excluded or included.” (Interview, 2/4/2021). When Morgan joined the women’s choir her sophomore year, she instantly felt a connection with her peers and found the space to be “empowering”:

It feels less like a class choir, and more like a community feeling. Immediately when you walk in there's people talking—well, of course, not now because of COVID—but there's just that sense of camaraderie and friendship and the people that I've met already—which,

these are people I've never interacted with before, but we've had so many conversations about, like, same TV interests, or something like that. (Interview, 2/4/2021)

I have experienced the same feelings of community, camaraderie, friendship, and belonging in women's choirs. That being said, the women's choirs in which I have sung have largely been made up of young students who presented as straight, Christian, white, liberal, and cisgender. There is part of me that wonders if those feelings of belonging were because it was the first and only space I had ever been in where I was not minoritized because of my gender identity and expression.

Inclusion in Women's Choirs: A Sense of Conflict

In hearing students describe what singing in a women's choir meant to them as singers, students often spoke to the inclusive nature of the ensemble. Megan has purposefully sought to foster an environment of inclusion throughout her time at Lowell University. Now that she feels there is a sense of inclusion within the ensemble, she is concerned that the word "women" may imply that the ensemble is not gender-inclusive, especially to those who are not part of the choral area:

I was so pleased to know that for those who've been in the ensemble for a while, articulated in a couple of different ways that it is inclusive. That was a relief to me, to know that that's how some are feeling. But that's not articulated in the name or course description for those who are *going* to be in the ensemble, who don't yet know me or the other singers. Why not just have the spoiler alert ahead of time? The student shouldn't have to think, "I wonder if these people are inclusive?" (Interview, 11/17/2020)

It is with this mindset that Megan and I began our relationship with this dissertation. When I asked her to be a participant in my dissertation, she was eager to take part in it. She knew I had

previously explored identity and inclusion in a women's choir. She was hoping to mirror that experience with her own students and inquire deeper into the greater question that has been on her mind for the past few years: does the name "women's choir" reflect the values of the choir as it currently stands, or does something else serve the same or a better purpose?

Summary

Throughout this chapter, I have discussed a variety of ways that gender and choir intersect, such as recruitment and retention, ensemble hierarchies and structures, gender identity, uniforms, repertoire selection and discussion, and singer identity and self-worth. Many of these issues were reflected in the ways that Megan has come to conceptualize the intersection of gender and choral music. She detailed the ways in which she has felt success in reframing students' perspectives about singing in a women's choir. She also expressed reservations that she has about having a women's choir 1) in a program that does not offer a men's or non-auditioned mixed ensemble, and 2) when there may be trans and gender-expansive singers who may not experience the same sense of belonging that their cisgender peers do in a women's space. Like Megan, I approached the project with lingering questions and conflicted feelings about creating and participating in choirs that may (un)intentionally exclude singers of a variety of gender identities. In Chapter 5, I will take a closer look at Megan's work with the women's choir as they consider issues of gender inclusion as it relates to their women's ensemble.

CHAPTER 5: PROFESSOR HARRIS AND LOWELL UNIVERSITY WOMEN'S CHOIR: EXPLORING GENDER INCLUSIVITY

In this chapter, I share the work that Megan and the women's choir singers did as they examined inclusion in their women's choir. Given my previous research and background with the project, Megan asked that I initially act as a facilitator and educator to her and the singers. As the project progressed, my role shifted to one of an observer, and I sought to insert my perspective only when Megan or the students asked a question or if I thought posing a question or scenario to the students and Megan would give them a more in-depth or nuanced approach to the topics at hand.

I include perspectives from the women's choir students, which includes quotes from large and small group discussions, as well as anonymous surveys and individual student interviews. I also include Megan's perspectives throughout the project and her reflections on students' responses and discussion points. Over the course of two semesters, Megan and the students made a number of changes to the course to make it more inclusive. Topics discussed include the name of the ensemble, membership policies, repertoire selection, course catalog descriptions, the ensemble's bio as used in concert programs and promotional material, and engaging in difficult conversations.

Perceptions Prior to the Project

When Megan began this project with the women's choir singers, it became clear that the students' understanding of gender and its influence on choral ensembles was varied. "The singers have varying degrees of understanding. Some came in with lots of knowledge regarding gender... and for some, it was very new information" (Interview, 3/15/2021). Students were given a variety of opportunities to engage in the project: anonymous surveys, small- and large-

group discussions, and individual student interviews. Students were also given the opportunity to anonymously reflect on their peers' perceptions of and positionality in relation to the project. I will thread student responses throughout the rest of the chapter.

“My Gender Identity Does Differ from the Label of Women’s Choir”: Michael’s Perspective

Gender Identity Disclosure

As I reached out to students about individual interviews, one student confided in me that although the singers and Professor Harris believe he is female and refer to him by his deadname,⁵ his closest friends call him Michael. When Michael talked about the women’s choir environment fostered by Professor Harris, he said “I think she does a good job of making it so that if I wanted to, it would be an easy experience. If I decided to come out, I would be welcomed” (Interview, 11/17/2020). Michael also spoke to the anxiety of coming out to someone: “I think it’s a lot easier to introduce yourself and be out in the first place than it is to not be out and then come out” (Interview, 11/17/2020).

Disclosing one’s gender identity, rather than introducing oneself as one’s identity, is a formidable task that gender-expansive individuals experience as they navigate their gender identity and expression. Like many trans and gender-expansive individuals, the elements that contributed to Michael’s gender identity disclosure were complex. “No matter how welcoming an environment is,” he said, “there’s still that fear, you know?” (Interview, 11/17/2020).

Although he would like to live openly as a trans man at school, he has concealed his gender identity from his parents. His desire to be out at school is overshadowed by his fear of a teacher or peer accidentally disclosing his gender identity to his parents. Michael’s experience is an

⁵ Merriam-Webster defines “deadname” as “the name that a transgender person was given at birth and no longer uses upon transitioning” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.).

important reminder that even if a student outwardly expresses as one sex (i.e., female), their internal sense of gender may differ. Trans and gender-expansive students may not be in a position to disclose their gender identity, even if teachers seek to create the most inclusive environments possible. With this in mind, conductors must actively reflect on policies and pedagogy in their choirs related to gender—uniform, audition process, part assignments, ensemble classification, and more—and reflect on if any of those elements would change if they had trans or gender-expansive students. If so, teacher-conductors should consider proactive ways to enact inclusive policy changes, rather than reacting only after a trans or gender-expansive student discloses their gender identity.

Women's Issues

The women's choir at Lowell University is not Michael's first experience singing in a women's choir. In high school, he also sang in a women's choir. One of the major discomforts of being in a women's choir is the assumption of a shared experience:

These conversations are important, but to focus on women's experiences in a way where music will center on, "Oh yes, *woman*." And I'm like, "*Oh, that's not me.*" ... But that's the main discomfort there. Just whenever the focus is there and I feel like my position doesn't align with that. (Interview, 11/17/2020)

Michael's perspective adds another layer of complication to choral ensembles classified by gender, as it is unlikely that all students will identify as male or female or with the supposed shared experiences of men and women. Michael clarified that he did not think the discussions centering on women should not exist:

I don't mind being in conversations about women's issues, but for the most part, I feel like that doesn't apply to me and that it's not my place to speak. While I do have discomfort

about this stuff, that's not in my priorities. I definitely think there needs to be a space for this sort of thing and to have the sort of discussion about women's issues. (Interview, 11/17/2020)

Over the years, I have heard conductors tell their singers that they do not need to identify with a piece of music in order to perform it or find meaning and connection with the music. I asked Michael if his relationship with women's choir music would change if the conversations were broadened to apply to more minoritized identities. "I think it might change my perspective a bit, but the fact that the main perspective is woman would still influence it" (Interview, 11/17/2020)

Repertoire. Currently, the women's choir is performing a piece called, "Never One Thing," by May Erlewine and arranged by Corie Brown. In it, the text does not explicitly state any one identity, but rather is broad in a way that could apply to any number of identities. For Michael, having a piece like this in a women's choir allows him to have a deeper and more personal connection to the piece:

The words seem to have a lot to do with the experience of being a person who is a minority in a way, someone who has some sort of internal dialogue. It's not explicitly stating any identity. It has a lot more to do with contradictions. It doesn't say I'm a woman, so I could put in my experience as a trans man or my experience as someone who's neurodiverse. It's just saying, "I've got these contradictions within me, and this who I am." (Interview, 11/17/2020)

As a singer, I have had a number of conductors tell me that I don't have to have the same experiences or perspectives that are displayed in a piece for me to be able to sing and connect with the music. This project has helped me reflect on how such sentiments must feel for

minoritized individuals, especially when their conductor is a part of the dominant group in society—white, cisgender, heterosexual, etc. When the music is centered on dominant perspectives and we ask minoritized students to connect with the dominant narrative in society, what kind of message does that send to students, especially if they never have an opportunity to sing music with which they personally identify? Michael’s experience shows the importance of diversifying perspectives and experiences within choral music to create environments that are more inclusive to a variety of minoritized identities.

Ensemble Hierarchy

When I asked Michael if his desire to sing in the mixed choir was related to gender or perceived musical prestige, he said they were both contributing factors. In Michael’s high school women’s choir, he said the focus of the choir was also more “academic,” saying that he was “more used to the very strict, very focused work on the music” (Interview, 11/17/2020). For him, the auditioned mixed ensemble aligns more closely with his previous experience of a rigorous choral experience. At LU, the only non-auditioned choir is the women’s choir, which can pigeonhole singers into being a part of the women’s choir, even if it doesn’t align with their gender identity.

Voice Part and Gender Identity

In the women's choir, Michael sings alto. If he were to sing in a mixed ensemble, he would likely continue to sing alto, even though it is not a voice part traditionally associated with male singers. Although Michael would eventually like to sing tenor or bass, he highlighted that when it comes to his gender identity, he views his singing and speaking voices differently:

I've got a strange relationship with my singing voice. Like, I do have a discomfort about my talking voice. However, whenever I sing, because my view is much more academic,

there's much less discomfort about it because I'm more thinking about the techniques and how I can improve or what I'm doing wrong. (Interview, 11/17/2020)

Michael also challenged some assumptions he had previously heard about trans singers going through hormone replacement therapy:

Once I saw this video about this trans opera singer, and he apparently was transitioning while in college as an opera performance major. One thing I found very strange—I think research wasn't exactly up to par on how testosterone affects the body. I remember some people being like, "It's *impossible!* Testosterone deteriorates your voice!" And I was like, "I don't think that's what it's doing. It's just doing to the body what testosterone would do to a *regular* male." (Interview, 11/17/2020)

This passage is an example of the assumptions people make about trans and gender-expansive singers that are made with the intent of causing the least amount of harm to students, yet are not based on research. Some teachers may have concerns about their students' physical health, but it is not our place to decide if their physical health is more important than their mental health. Readers should not take Michael's experience and generalize it to all trans male singers, as no single trans or gender-expansive person represents the entire trans and gender-expansive community. Michael's perspective, however, acts as an important reminder that students are experts of their own experiences, and it is the responsibility of teachers to respond according to students' needs.

Ensemble Name and Membership

Michael has talked with the trans people in his life about the disconnect of singing in a women's choir when one's gender identity does not align with that of the ensemble. His suitemate, who is also trans and a musician, is also hesitant to enroll in a choir that is specifically

labeled as *women*. “I’ve met a lot of queer people where if the gender association of choir wasn’t there, they would definitely try and do choir” (Interview, 11/17/2020).

Some students in the LU women’s choir have floated ideas such as an intersectional choir or a choir that specifically highlights diversity issues. For Michael, “that’s not actually where my priorities are. Our first priority right now is just to find a space where we’re comfortable. I just want to have a space where I can sing comfortably” (Interview, 11/17/2020).

For Michael, having choirs classified by voice type, rather than by gender, is the most logical solution:

I like the idea of having treble choirs, and I like the idea of having tenor-bass choirs. One thing for ensembles that are labeled with the name of men or women is if there were more spots in the voice part for people who identify in either label to have bass or tenor or parts for trans women in women’s ensembles, or maybe having higher voice parts in men’s ensembles. That way, people—*all people*—within that identity group could have a place, but also having tenor-bass, and then treble for the people of that voice part to have that sort of homogeneity of sound. (Interview, 11/17/2020)

Michael provided a unique perspective to the project as a singer who does not identify as female yet sings within a women’s ensemble. Michael gave me permission to anonymously share his comments with Megan so she could gain a better understanding of the implications of gender as it related to the women’s choir. Between the anonymous surveys and Michael’s interview, we both moved forward with a dedication to making sure that we did not share comments that made people feel the space may not be safe for them as trans or gender-expansive singers and to acknowledge the variety of identities present within the ensemble.

Reflecting on Anonymous Student Surveys

As I shared the anonymized student responses and broader themes, many of the students explicitly stated that they resonated with “the concept of ‘the name isn’t inclusive, but the environment is’” (Interview, 11/17/2020). The students also reflected on things they had not considered prior to hearing their peers’ reflections, discomfort they had around the topic and discussion, how men played into the discussion of gender inclusion in gender-segregated spaces, the value of the project, and things they would like their peers, conductor, and myself as a researcher to take into consideration moving forward. I will go into detail and provide student quotes for each of those themes below. Afterward, I will include Megan’s reflections on the singers’ responses.

Student Reflections

New Thoughts and Considerations. In the first survey, many students stated that they valued being in a space with women because of the shared experience that they had as women. For those students, it appears that they assumed that shared experiences lead to shared opinions and were thus taken back by the variety of ideas and opinions represented within the ensemble. “I feel a bit unsettled about the range of our responses regarding who should be included in this ensemble. I assumed we were all on the same page, and we are far from that at the moment” (Interview, 11/17/2020). Students highlighted a variety of topics they hadn’t considered, such as trans men who sing soprano or alto, trans women who sing tenor or bass, cisgender men joining or conducting a women’s choir, or singers’ gender identity and expression not aligning with the ensemble.

Discomfort. Students expressed discomfort for a variety of reasons. One trans singer wrote, “some of the responses felt transphobic and exclusive, but didn’t outwardly say it, which

is scary” (Anonymous Survey, 11/16/2020). For a student who did not identify as female, they said being in a women’s space “makes me personally uncomfortable, and I did not think it would mean so much to others” (Anonymous Survey, 11/16/2020). Some students had not considered and were disheartened that gendered spaces could cause discomfort to their trans and gender-expansive peers. “The way people may not feel comfortable or included here makes me sad” (Anonymous Survey, 11/16/2020).

There were a few students who expressed discomfort because of the varied opinions. Some of those students were trans or gender expansive: “I feel like if I share my opinions, they would not be greeted warmly with other people in the group” (Anonymous Survey, 11/16/2020). Others were uncomfortable because of an obvious difference in values: “Honestly, the whole topic is touchy for so many people, and we all grew up differently. It can be unsettling to feel any tension arising from these differences” (Anonymous Survey, 11/16/2020).

One student felt she could not fully share their opinions because her opinions deviated from what she felt like were the norm in the choir:

I have a hard time fully getting “on board” with this gender conversation in terms of nonbinary, trans-women, etc., just because even if no one brings it up, we all have very different views. I know my understanding of identity has been more binary-informed and talking about this feels like walking on eggshells where people are trying to catch me being “politically incorrect” in some way. (Anonymous Survey, 11/16/2020)

Another student also felt they couldn’t share their opinion, but for different reasons. “I mainly feel like my opinions are overshadowed because my experiences are different. As a nonbinary person I know my opinions are going to differ from that of those of my cis choir members” (Anonymous Survey, 11/16/2020). Overall, even though students found value in the project, they

were uncertain of the best way to proceed without potentially disrupting the positive dynamic of the ensemble.

Considering Cisgender Men. As the students considered inclusion in women's and treble ensembles, a few students made it clear that they were open to trans and gender-expansive singers joining the ensemble, but that they did not want cisgender men to sing in the ensemble. The reasoning varied, ranging from feeling like they could not speak their mind around their cisgender male peers to trauma related to previous experiences with cisgender men. Some students had not considered excluding cisgender men from singing in women's and treble ensembles:

I feel really bad about how many people bring up excluding cis men in the ensemble. I think it's a little mean and working against inclusion. I think it's especially important to allow men to learn about women's issues, especially if those men are preparing to become music educators where they will potentially work with younger treble/women's ensembles that aren't as experienced expressing their sense of self. We should focus on allowing people to learn because we'll never get anywhere otherwise. (Anonymous Survey, 11/16/2020).

Because gendered spaces like women's and men's choirs are defined by gender exclusion, some may see those spaces as exclusionary. At LU where there is no men's or tenor-bass equivalent to the ensemble, the students felt all the more compelled to take their male peers into consideration to ensure that singers of a variety of gender identities have a space to sing in and feel safe and comfortable.

Value of Project. Despite the discomfort many of the singers expressed throughout the survey, one of the most significant themes of the responses was that the students were grateful to

have the space to discuss the topic, even if it is difficult. “I love how hard this is to figure out but that people still agree it’s worth figuring out to better our group. No it’s not easy but it will be worth it” (Anonymous Survey, 11/16/2020). Another student valued the variety of opinions and the thoughtfulness presented by their peers. “I found all the different points of view really honest and sincere and it really resonated with me how insightful and curious all the singers are” (Anonymous Survey, 11/16/2020). For students who may have never considered the intersection of gender and music, the project was an important way for them to consider the viewpoints and perspectives of others:

I hate that this hasn’t been a discussion at any other point in my life. just thinking about all the people that may have been excluded from ensembles because they didn’t feel like they were welcome or that it was safe for them to be there is devastating (Anonymous Survey, 11/16/2020)

Although Megan could have made an executive decision about the direction of the women’s choir, the students’ reflections show the value in including students in the decision-making process, even if the topics may be difficult or uncomfortable to broach. One member of the LGBTQIA+ community drove the importance of the issue home even further, saying, “I really appreciate that you’re doing this. Opening up the floor to these kinds of discussions are especially important to me as a nonbinary person. It’s hard to start the conversation myself sometimes” (Anonymous Survey, 11/16/2020). As Megan continually reflected on and evolved her conception of what it meant to be an ally, comments such as the previous one further solidified her commitment to include students in the process and to be explicit about her positionality.

Professor Harris's Reactions

As Megan and I read through student comments, we were both impressed with the level of engagement and reflection the students had about gender in women's choirs. Although both of us grew up espousing a feminist perspective, it wasn't something we directly applied to our choral experience. Like the students, she was also interested in the wide range of responses and wanted students to understand the variety of perspectives in the ensemble. "We are all taking this in differently because we have our own unique set of experiences – in part due to our diversity of race, religion, gender, etc." (Interview, 11/17/2020).

Megan shared many of the students' thoughts, questions, reflections, and concerns. For example, she related to students' experiences of not considering the impact gendered ensembles would have on trans men who sang soprano or alto. "I remember thinking the same thing when I first started thinking about these issues. That was the one demographic of singer where I thought, 'Yeah, what about that person? What about those people?'" (Interview, 11/30/2020). Megan was particularly interested in the shared disconnect she and the students felt about gender inclusion in spaces defined by gender exclusion:

I was surprised by the consistency of people feeling like, "Wait a sec. If we want to be inclusive, but we don't want men to have any form of interaction with this group, that's not very inclusive. That was interesting to me. There were a handful of students who wondered, "What do we really mean by that?" (Interview #3, 11/30/2020)

In previous conversations with Megan, she said she believed there may be one nonbinary singer in the ensemble, but she wasn't certain. The demographic survey responses of the students revealed that there were at least three students who were trans or gender expansive. The students did not explicitly say if they had disclosed their gender identity within the ensemble, but it

became apparent that many of the singers assumed that all of their peers were female. In a previous study I did with a women's choir on inclusion, I also made this assumption and did not even consider asking gender in a demographic survey. I recall being so frustrated with myself:

Jessica: I remember thinking, "This is ridiculous that I didn't even think to ask, when that's the *whole point* of this project. *I should be the person that knows to ask that.*"

Megan: Right? We're just so ingrained. I'm glad to hear this because I feel like every time I make a dumb mistake of "she" rather than "they," I'm like (smacks forehead), "I thought I was done with the messing up. But alas (shrugs). Here we are. (Interview, 11/06/2020)

As teacher-conductors implement more gender-inclusive language into their day-to-day teaching, they must also work to unlearn assumptions about gender identity in relation to gender expression. One such change includes not assuming students' gender identities based on their appearances and providing students with the opportunity to provide their name and pronouns in a private setting. For example, teacher-conductors could have students do a written getting-to-know-you assignment, rather than asking students to announce their name and pronoun in class before the students have determined if they would like to disclose their gender identity.

As I shared student responses and broader survey themes to the choir, I did this with the desire to highlight the broad spectrum of student opinion. I included a variety of student comments, including students who were hesitant to expand the definition of women's choir. It became clear that some of the anonymous student comments made LGBTQIA+ students question if they belonged in the choir or if the choir was a safe place. One nonbinary student said, "People talk like there's aren't nonbinary individuals in the choir already. It feels alienating and gross to be discussed like I might not belong here, or that I'm not here. I AM here"

(Anonymous Survey, 11/16/2020). As Megan began the project with the women's choir students, a gender-expansive student had one request for their conductor. "If possible, I would love to hear your own opinion. I would also be interested in knowing if Professor Harris, or at least I would like the clarification, that you are allies/members of the LGBTQ+ community" (Anonymous Survey, 11/16/2020). The following conversation is an example of how Megan and I worked through our ideas on inclusion and allyship in educational settings:

Megan: One or two people who said, "Some of this feels transphobic, and I'm really concerned that this is actually not a safe space to talk about who I am," or, "I'm not at a point where I want to talk about who I am, *but* I want to know that this is a space of allies, and I'm not sure if it is yet." And that was obviously like the biggest *sad* takeaway.

Jessica: It's one of those things where you *think* you're doing something, and then there's a reminder that you just have to be so explicit. ... There are people that I really want to learn something from this experience, and the teacher in me is trying to keep the discussion so open that those students are going to be open to learning. But then it's at the expense of the people that need my support the most.

Megan: Yeah, yeah. So what do we do about that?

Jessica: *Yeah. What do we do about that?*

Megan: It makes me surprised and sad to think that those individuals don't think that we are allies. To me, in what world would a choir director bring in a colleague to even go through all of this if there wasn't allyship and a real commitment to inclusion? But somehow that's not translating.

Jessica: I've been really reflecting on this idea of ally and I don't know if I can call myself an ally. I feel like it's a gift that people can give to me: "You are an ally. I dub

thee ally.” Because I could think that I’m ... making an environment where they know that they belong and that they’re safe and that I value them, but if they don’t feel that way, it doesn’t matter. I’m a big believer in letting students know when we feel like we failed or haven’t done enough.

Megan: And of course I have no problem stating that. I was sad to see there are one or two people who are like, “I’m going to keep my mouth shut because my opinion isn’t politically correct.” ... And then how does that person move forward and contribute? Because I’m sure they’re not going to like to hear it because they’re going to feel like, “Again this isn’t a place for me because I have the unpopular opinion.” And Megan, not Professor Harris, doesn’t care. But Professor Harris, conductor of *all* singers in this group, doesn’t want them to sign out and stop contributing. I mean, I *want* them to change their opinion. ... We know that we all have different understandings and opinions and where we all fall... and some of your viewpoints are not going to fit within that, and that’s okay. But for me, the important thing is that it’s okay that we all have different opinions. That’s expected. That’s great. Fine. What’s *not* okay is that someone doesn’t feel heard or welcome or that they can share who they are—and *certainly* no discriminatory language of any kind—but that we all are trying to figure out who we are, where we are, what we want, what we think. It’s fine.” (Interview, 11/30/2020)

This exchange is an example of one of the many conversations Megan and I had as we negotiated our privileged role as teacher-conductors, cisgender women, and aspiring allies. At times during this project, Megan sought for me to consult her as she attempted to create a space inclusive to a variety of gender identities. At other times, we acted as confidants to one another as we worked through inclusion issues. Although we often didn’t feel like there was one correct

answer for the group, discussions like the one above demonstrate our mutual and evolving dedication to open communication with our students, with focuses on facilitating difficult conversations within the ensemble and not claiming to be the source of all knowledge when it comes to inclusion.

As Megan and the students worked through this project, she wanted to participate in the journey alongside the singers:

I don't want them to have the impression that we're facilitating this because we know the answer and we're hoping they come to it. I know what I want it to *feel* like. I know what I want the sentiment to be. I *don't* know what the answer is. That's what we're all here for. (Interview, 11/30/2020)

As she read through student comments, Megan was drawn to their desire to look at the issue not necessarily because it impacted them directly, but because they recognized the impact it had on others. Although some students struggled with the potential of no longer being a women's choir, others did not because they saw the language of the ensemble as inherently exclusive. Some of the students highlighted that the choir could still focus on women's issues but that the membership did not have to consist exclusively of women. "That had never dawned on me," said Megan. "That adds another layer of complication for programming. Logistically, it would take time, but that's an interesting perspective" (Interview, 11/17/2020). Logistically, Megan also recognized the problematic nature of forcing singers who may not identify as female to sing in a women's choir. "If that's part of the degree program, we've gotta make it a more inclusive" (Interview, 11/17/2020).

As I talked with Megan about not knowing the answer to gender inclusion in women's ensembles, I admitted that I was becoming more and more cautious about women's choirs,

especially in school settings because of the message it could send to trans and gender-expansive singers. She echoed my sentiments:

Although I still don't know the answer, I am pretty sure it's not "women's choir." And I think a *lot* of the students are feeling that way. Not all of them. I think some of them don't care because it doesn't affect them. But I would say maybe one or two just don't care, and then one or two are probably holding on to familial beliefs that either they'll figure out someday, or they won't. And I think the rest are your classic college students who are absorbing this information and are like, "*Yeah*, this needs to change for my friend, or for me." (Interview, 11/30/2020)

Megan has found comfort and empowerment in women's spaces while also feeling a discomfort about the possibility of excluding students of a variety of gender identities. Trans, gender-expansive, and cisgender students' outlooks on the choir helped shape Megan's concept of gendered choirs. As she heard students share that they felt the title "women" was exclusionary, she was all the more compelled to make changes to the choir that would create a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive environment for her current and future students.

Megan was relieved to know that for students who had been in the ensemble, especially prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, that many of them saw it as an inclusive space. For students who were not already in the ensemble, however, she felt that they may not be able to get a full sense of the ensemble's inclusion efforts based on the name, course description, and bio. Although Megan strived to have an inclusive environment, she concluded that the name, membership policies, and marketing surrounding the ensemble was in dissonance with her overall goal, message, and philosophy of the ensemble. It was with that conviction that Megan and the students moved forward to create actionable change within the women's choir.

The Project

Because most of the singers in the ensemble are freshmen and sophomores, Megan was aware that the first years of college can be a pivotal moment for many students wrestling with their gender identity:

Maybe a handful of students who are nonbinary, transgender, something in their heart and mind is happening *right now* in their life. That change is happening *in this moment*. I wonder if this is really hitting home in terms of student identity and how it's shifting right now in their life? (Interview, 11/06/2020)

With this in mind, Megan wanted to be all the more cognizant of the discourse surrounding this project and ensuring that students knew she was approaching this conversation because of a deep sense of care for her trans and gender-expansive students. The concern and thoughtful reflection that Megan displayed for students is an example of the role that privileged individuals (in this case, cisgender people) play in facilitating difficult conversations that directly impact minoritized identities (in this case, trans and gender-expansive people). Privileged individuals must consider the trauma that these individuals may have experienced and ensure that the conversations that take place in their class do the least amount of harm.

The following sections address some of the major topics and themes that came up in the group discussions, as well as some of Megan's interactions and reflections along the way.

Professor Harris's Positionality

Initially, Megan did not share her positionality on the project. "I didn't want to influence what the group thought... but these are strong-minded students, and I don't think if I would have shared that from the beginning that it would have influenced them" (Interview, 3/15/2020). After having a student state that they wanted clarification on whether or not she was an ally, she

shared her trajectory as an advocate and ally, beginning with her involvement in a non-profit organization that fought for marriage equality in her home state. She shared some of her efforts to make the women's choir at LU a more cohesive part of the music department, starting first with quality repertoire and moving to "challenging and meaningful conversations" (November 30, 2020) through repertoire selection. Over time, however, she had concerns about inclusion, both for the singers in the ensemble whose identity did not align with "women" and for singers who may not join the ensemble out of fear that they would not be welcomed:

I could see it in their faces, in *your* faces, and I heard it in one-on-one conversations—discomfort, concern, disconnectedness—and to me that very thing rubbed against the very thing that I believe the arts and choral music can do for society. (Group Discussion, 11/30/2020)

Megan thanked the singers for sharing their thoughts and perspectives through the anonymous surveys and small and large group discussion. In talking with and listening to students, Megan let the students know that classifying the ensemble as a women's choir was "giving me pause":

It's becoming clear that the name itself is a clear roadblock for some singers to register. And at the same time, I deeply value women's spaces. ... But I think we can strive to have a space where we can consider women's issues while still holding a space that is comfortable and aligns with our students and societal population. I think the arts make space for these types of conversations, and while women's issues are one of them, it's not the only thing that this ensemble has focused on in the past, and I know there's much more space for many more topics for us to explore. (Group Discussion, 11/30/2020)

The topic of inclusion in gendered spaces is nuanced and complex. For people like Megan who have found gendered spaces to be affirming and empowering, considering reorganizing groups

like a women's choir is a decision that is influenced by personal experience and deep ties to tradition. As Megan considered her approach to teaching women's choirs, she wanted to provide the same sort of spaces and experiences to trans and gender-expansive singers that she has so consciously crafted for female singers. In considering removing "women" from the choir's name and classification, she framed the reconstruction not as a loss of women's spaces, but a restructure that would open up the choir to new possibilities in terms of repertoire, membership, and student perspective.

Difficult Conversations

After the first few group meetings, many students came to realize that the opinions within the ensemble were not as homogenous as they had previously thought. The ensemble spent part of two separate days talking in small and large groups about their experiences broaching difficult conversations, either in their personal, academic, or professional lives. Megan acknowledged the additional challenge of engaging over Zoom, saying she has often thought, "Is what I'm about to say worthy to drag this mouse over to click unmute?" (Group Discussion, 11/9/2020).

Each of the groups focused on active listening strategies, locutions and sentence stems to frame open and honest conversations, and giving participants the option to disengage from the conversation if they felt that the discussion was unproductive or harmful. "It can be really difficult to either hear someone else's point of view or to share it in a way that's non-threatening and informing, not preaching or talking over or talking down to someone" (Group Discussion, 11/30/2020), especially if one participant feels they know more than the other. A common sentiment that was shared was the idea of listening to listen, rather than listening to respond, so they could come to understand their peers' perspectives even more and determine the best course of action from there.

In small and large group discussion, students talked broadly and specifically about their successes and challenges discussing the topic at hand or other difficult topics. For one student who identified as queer, they talked about being the first openly LGBTQIA+ student in their high school and the burden of being their peers' first experience with a member of the LGBTQIA+ community. "I really wished people had done their research and *then* talked to me, instead of expecting me to answer for them" (Group Discussion, 11/30/2020). "As someone that's queer, it can be really hard to listen to people debate against your rights" (Group Discussion, 11/30/2020).

Students discussed making sure that all parties consented to the discussion. "I know a lot of people will always be up for having a conversation, but some people aren't" (Group Discussion, 11/30/2020). Another student agreed "Please make sure that everyone is consenting it, and don't sneak it up, and don't expect people of color and other marginalized people who always educate" (Group Discussion, 11/30/2020).

A number of singers voiced how difficult it was to engage in impassioned discussions. One student said that when they talk about topics about which they are passionate, they "get very, very involved, sometimes in a negative way, sometimes in a positive way" (Group Discussion, 11/30/2020). If there is a point of contention, "it's important to remember ... it's just a small percentage of people working from a place of malice, and you have to be equally as patient when trying to get your point across" (Group Discussion, 11/30/2020).

For many of the white cisgender students in the class, they said they were working on knowing when it was their place to engage and when it was their responsibility to "uplift voices instead of talking over them" (Group Discussion, 11/30/2020). One student framed their position as one similar to imposter syndrome, where they were uncomfortable engaging in discussions about minoritized identities "because you don't live in that skin, you don't live in that body, you

don't live in that identity, or you don't live that life" (Group Discussion, 11/30/2020). Another student said that while they enjoyed these types of discussions, they were "more of a person who enjoys listening and really digesting" before engaging, especially out of fear of "someone [taking] my words the wrong way or just [saying] something that may not be exactly right" (Group Discussion, 11/30/2020).

One student said the discussion was difficult because there were "so many good points, and then so many *other* good points that contradict the good points, and so personally, I'm just trying to figure out what I prioritize out of this class" (Group Discussion, 1/15/2021). Megan agreed, saying "if there was a right answer, a perfect right answer, a blanket statement, we'd already be using it, and it'd be easy. So I'm glad you reminded all of us that there's no perfect answer" (Group Discussion, 1/15/2021).

Ensemble Name and Classification

A large portion of the project danced around issues related to the name of the ensemble and its classification. Although some students were clearly in the camp of either keeping the ensemble a women's ensemble or removing the gender classification altogether, the majority of students shared that they understood the merits of both systems and were torn on what was right for their ensemble. If the choir were to remain a women's ensemble, students tried to troubleshoot how they would make a trans woman who sang bass feel included. "Maybe just double the alto two an octave lower?", proffered up one student, with another asking, "would it be easier to kind of broaden the range and the music that we're doing?" (Group Discussion, 1/15/2021). Where the group struggled was how to signal to students outside the ensemble that Professor Harris would "absolutely program music that [trans women] could sing and feel

comfortable doing so,” even if the singers “may not fall under the SA or soprano-alto category” (Group Discussion, 1/22/2021).

Over the course of the three months that the project took place, the group discussions continued to lead to the belief that the choir should move away from being a “women’s choir,” both in name and classification. Students spent some time in small groups brainstorming group ideas, but the task proved to be daunting for one class period. I shared with the students that when I have to make difficult decisions, I sometimes am better at deciding what I did not like rather than what I did, and I sometimes made decisions as a result of avoiding the things that I found to be distasteful. Both Megan and the singers felt that naming the choir something that sounded feminine—like *Bella Voce* or *Elektra*—was antithetical to the project. One student felt that “if we want to take out the gendered name and make it available to everybody, then doing it in another language isn’t necessarily doing that” (Group Discussion, 1/22/2021).

After determining that they no longer wanted a feminine-sounding name, Megan talked with students about how “the name of your choir is kind of like your brand... so when we pick the name, do we want it to be clearly showing that our goal is inclusivity?” (Group Discussion, 1/22/2021). One of the names that students offered up was “Intersectional Choir” to signal that the choir sought to represent a variety of identities. One student felt that if the course description spoke to the logistics of the ensemble, “I don’t think the title necessarily has to be about inclusion as long as it is inclusive” (Group Discussion, 1/22/2021). Another student felt the choir needed to decide if the focus of the group was, “This is a space where you can feel comfortable as a minority,” or, “we’re a group of people who make music,” (Group Discussion, 1/22/2021) and that the name of the ensemble would follow suit. In considering the branding of an ensemble, teacher-conductors should consider not only the individual ensemble, but the choir

program as a whole, and the inevitability of a choir eventually being taught by another teacher-conductor. The name and purpose of an ensemble is also determined by other musical ensembles in the organization, the age of the singers, whether the choir is part of a school system or a community ensemble, and much more. Teacher-conductors should remember that a choir's name is more than a name, but rather one of the first symbols of the group and a major part of singer recruitment.

Membership

Early on in the project, it became clear that there were students who worked under the assumption that all of the singers identified as female. One student who did not identify as female asked that Professor Harris and I explain to the students that that is not the case. "Some of us are not cis women and that some of us identify as genderfluid, gender non-conforming, nonbinary, trans, etc. I think if the class is aware of that they may think differently" (Anonymous Survey, 11/16/2020). In the following class periods, Megan and I shared both student responses that echoed this sentiment, as well as reminders prior to discussions that not everyone in the ensemble was cisgender. After the initial surveys, fewer students made comments that implied or stated that the members of the choir were all female.

Students tried to strike a balance of considering the value of women's spaces while acknowledging that the choir program at LU did not necessarily accommodate for trans, gender-expansive, or male singers who may not make it into the auditioned mixed ensemble or who did not want to take on the extra time—rehearsal and performance—and financial commitment—uniforms and tours—of the auditioned ensemble. As students discussed, they wanted the choir "to be a space where all who participate feel comfortable, and it's a balance of not excluding anyone and still trying to make sure we focus on women's issues" (Group Discussion,

1/14/2021). In the university's course catalogue, a prerequisite of the course said that the choir was open to all *female* students. Students noted that transitioning to a choir of sopranos and altos "is going to be the easiest thing because that's basically what we are, just nobody would know from the name alone" (Group Discussion, 1/15/2021).

Ensemble Meaning-Making

Students within the women's choir created meaning within the ensemble in a variety of ways. Many of the perceptions contradicted one another. Although some students specified the women's choir as a place of female empowerment, others were concerned that the gendered label of the ensemble was inherently exclusive. "I don't like how the only non-audition option [for choir at LU] is 'women's choir,'" wrote one student. "That excludes so many people" (Anonymous Survey, 11/6/2020). Others explicitly said they found a sense of belonging within the choir because of perceived shared experience with peers of the same perceived sex (i.e., female).

Because the choral department is only made up of a non-auditioned women's choir and an auditioned mixed choir, many singers who present as female at least start their choral career at Lowell University singing in the women's choir. Because music students require ensemble credits in order to graduate, some students said they were only enrolled in the course to fulfill graduation requirements. A number of scholars have written on ensemble hierarchy and its relation to gender. Women's choirs are often seen as inferior to mixed ensembles, and as a result, singers may reluctantly enroll in women's choirs (Gauthier, 2005; O'Toole, 1998; Wilson, 2013), especially if they had negative experiences in their high school women's choirs (Major, 2017).

Mixed versus Single-Gender Ensembles

When students were asked to compare their sense of meaning and belonging in mixed choirs and women's choirs, there also was a range of responses. Some singers had sung in women's choirs before and had negative experiences, especially in comparison with their experiences in mixed ensembles. "I think that historically women's ensembles have been a source of drama and malice, and so even though I'm super privileged to identify as a woman, women's ensembles have always kind of scared me" (Anonymous Survey, 11/6/2020). Another student echoed that "women's choirs tend to have more drama and petty competition, and the vibe of a mixed choir is just more mellow" (Anonymous Survey, 11/6/2020). A few of the singers focused not on the culture of the choir, but the ensemble make-up itself. "It's definitely different in that it feels like we're not complete? My hs choir was mixed and when we had men sing the bass notes, it felt full" (Anonymous Survey, 11/6/2020). The students' responses reflected those of the participants in Gauthier's (2005) survey, who noted both social and musical reasons for preferring to sing in mixed ensembles rather than women's choirs.

Others found connection with fellow female singers. "Whenever I'm in a women's choir, or a treble choir, I feel more connected with everyone else," (Anonymous Survey, 11/6/2020) said one singer, with another saying they felt "more isolated" in a mixed choir, as opposed to a women's choir, where "I feel like everyone there is my friend, and I don't feel so lonely" (Anonymous Survey, 11/6/2020). A member of the women's choir specified that she felt more connection with singers in a women's choir was because she feels "nervous around men" (Anonymous Survey, 11/6/2020). This sentiment has been shared by proponents of women's-only domestic violence shelters given that the majority of domestic violence against women is committed by men. The unintended consequence, however, is that trans women are often

excluded under the presumption that cisgender women may be uncomfortable by the presence of trans women (Apsani, 2018).

The singers valued the type of repertoire they believed women's choir sang as compared to mixed ensembles. "In my experience, mixed ensembles do not make the effort to promote and perform music by women, and singing those overlooked pieces is important to me" (Anonymous Survey, 11/6/2020). This student's comment reflects the concerted effort that Megan makes to choose music that has a personal and social connection to her and the musicians.

Throughout the project, it became evident that multiple singers did not identify as female and that the gendered classification of the ensemble caused some gender-expansive singers discomfort. One singer specifically focused on the name "women's choir," saying "I wish our choir was labeled as a treble choir instead of a women's choir. I only joined this choir because it said treble in the description" (Anonymous Survey, 11/6/2020). One gender-expansive student said, "There is some discomfort with the name of a women's ensemble as there is that feeling of being an imposter" (Anonymous Survey, 11/6/2020). A trans singer specified that he had a "more academic relationship with my voice when singing compared to when I'm speaking" (Anonymous Survey, 11/6/2020) and thus did not feel singing alto caused him to feel dissonance about his gender within the context of singing. Of the gendered nature of the ensemble, another gender-expansive singer said, "I don't feel like it limits me, but it definitely makes me feel uncomfortable on my bad days" (Anonymous Survey, 11/6/2020). These comments reflect students' desires to sing in an ensemble as well as their discomfort with the gendered nature of the membership and discussions.

Because the choir's label is gendered, some students highlighted gender differences between mixed and women's choirs. "I'm assuming that all of the people in the women's choir

identify as a woman in some way” (Anonymous Survey, 11/6/2020). One singer said, “I would assume that a mixed ensemble would be more diverse in gender identifications” (Anonymous Survey, 11/6/2020), presumably because the label of the choir is not gendered. Although choirs and voice types have long been classified according to gender, not all singers will be cisgender or identify within the gender binary. Because mixed choirs are often the top auditioned ensemble in choir programs, trans and gender-expansive singers who are not invited to sing in mixed ensembles are presented with a series of difficult choices. Some singers may feel they cannot disclose their gender identity because of the gendered nature of the ensembles. Others may share that they are trans or gender expansive but may be in a position where they either have to sing in an ensemble whose gender classification does not align with their own (e.g., a trans woman singing in a men’s ensemble), or they may sing in an ensemble with repertoire that does not fit with their voice classification (e.g., a trans man may sing in a women’s choir if they typically sing soprano).

Ensemble Make-Up

In previous conversations with Megan, she said she believed there may have been one nonbinary singer in the ensemble, but she wasn’t certain. The demographic survey responses of the students revealed that there were at least three students who were trans or gender expansive. The students did not explicitly say if they had disclosed their gender identity within the ensemble, but many of the survey responses either implied or explicitly stated that the students believed that every singer in the women’s choir identified as female. For trans and gender-expansive individuals, a variety of factors impact whether they feel they can disclose their gender identity. Palkki (2017) discussed a variety of factors that influence trans and gender-expansive singers in choral ensembles, such as geography, voice parts, and relationships with

peers and mentors. Each of the previous factors also determine whether a trans or gender-expansive singer feels safe and supported in the choir, which can influence whether or not they share their name and pronouns. Depending on singer comfort and safety, trans and gender-expansive signers may outwardly present as a gender that does not align with their internal sense of gender (e.g., a nonbinary person who presents as a woman in spaces designated for women).

When students were prompted to discuss what membership policies should look like, they fell into multiple schools of thought. Some specified that the choir was a women's space while simultaneously acknowledging the potential disconnect between women's spaces and gender inclusion. "This is a tough question. I am all for inclusion, but I also feel passionate about spaces for women" (Anonymous Survey, 11/6/2020). For one singer, the purpose of the women's choir was to have a space with people who have had similar experiences in society. "As we are challenged in similar ways, we can bond through shared experiences and the constructions of our bodies. I find it very impactful to be able to connect to other women through this choir" (Anonymous Survey, 11/6/2020). The value of women's spaces is echoed in the work of music education scholars, many of whom work under the assumption that female singers are undervalued in choral programs (Carp, 2004; Dame, 2019; Gackle, 2011; Spurgeon, 2012). Other students expressed that while women's spaces should exist, "I don't think the women's choir should be the default choir for non-auditioned treble voices" (Anonymous Survey, 11/6/2020). The choir program at LU mirrors many choir programs throughout the United States where the auditioned ensemble is the mixed ensemble, and the women's, men's, treble, and tenor-bass ensembles are the default non-audition ensemble (Gauthier, 2005; Major, 2017; O'Toole, 1998; Wilson, 2013). Smaller programs, such as the choir program at LU, may not offer a mixed choir that does not require an audition.

One singer proposed a broader definition for women's choir membership: "Anyone who identifies as a woman, anyone who uses she/her pronouns, or anyone who would feel more comfortable in the setting of a women's choir" (Anonymous Survey, 11/6/2020), leaving room for singers whose gender identity differs from the label of the women's choir. Another said membership "should consist of those who identify as women and/or want to be a part of a community where that is a focus" (Anonymous Survey, 11/6/2020). Another singer highlighted that a space for women should be inclusive of trans women. "I would really love to see a world where trans women would be able to also join a group labeled 'women's choir' and feel belonging and as if they have a part with their voice" (Anonymous Survey, 11/6/2020). Because of the relatively new nature of discourse surrounding inclusion in traditionally single-gender ensembles, some singers expressed that their opinions about ensemble membership and classification were evolving to consider trans and gender-expansive individuals. "Traditionally, I would say cis female and individuals who identify as female, but after thinking more about nonbinary or gender nonconforming, I really don't know" (Anonymous Survey, 11/6/2020).

Trans women in women's spaces has been a topic of debate for decades, with the most recent public and legal debate surrounding the inclusion or exclusion of trans athletes from women's sports (DeGregory, 2021). Because of the relationship between choral music and gender, membership policies are complicated. Although some trans and gender-expansive singers see their voice type (i.e., soprano, alto, tenor, or bass) as an essential part of their gender expression, others reveal that their voice type may differ from societal standards (Palkki, 2016). For ensembles that are classified by gender rather than voice type, there is thus potential for a trans woman to be in the ensemble who sings tenor or bass, and women's choirs typically sing treble music. For choirs that move away from gender classification and focus on voice type (i.e.,

treble and tenor-bass ensembles), conductors may find that cisgender men who sing soprano or alto may enroll in the ensemble, which may lead to the discomfort of female peers who enrolled under the presumption of the space not being occupied by men.

Some singers had already reconceptualized the identity of the choir as a treble ensemble rather than a women's choir. "When I think of a women's choir, I think of singing treble music, so I guess anyone with a treble voice [should be able to join]. I have been in women's choirs where there are transgender and nonbinary people, and it did not take away from the choir in any way" (Anonymous Survey, 11/6/2020). For another singer, they considered what being in a women's choir might be like for gender-expansive individuals. "If I were gender-nonconforming, I would feel alienated and pressure to feel and be a certain way" (Anonymous Survey, 11/6/2020). As such, this particular individual felt the choir should move away from being a women's choir to a choir whose label was not gender-specific. The sentiment of moving away from a gendered label for the sake of inclusion was shared by multiple students throughout the survey.

Inclusion and Exclusion. As students reflected on inclusion and exclusion in a women's choir, there were again an array of responses. One gender-expansive singer found the gendered nature of the group to be exclusive, saying "I personally feel like I don't belong in this choir" (Anonymous Survey, 11/6/2020). This gender-expansive student's sentiment surrounding belonging was echoed by trans and gender-expansive singers in Palkki's (2016) dissertation detailing the experiences of trans students in high school choirs. One cisgender student stated, "I don't think [the name] is problematic. This is not meant to be a choir for Anyone, but a choir for Every woman, and there are other groups that can meet the needs of separate individuals" (Anonymous Survey, 11/6/2020) Given the ensemble hierarchy at LU, however, trans men and

gender-expansive individuals who do not identify as female may be funneled into a women's ensemble even if it does not align with their gender identity. Another voiced frustration surrounding the conversation of inclusion in women's spaces. "I think it's fine and that it's been fine for the years we've had it. People are starting to get upset about it now bc they want/need to feel accepted in every aspect of life" (Anonymous Survey, 11/6/2020). This comment from a student is an example of a perspective that could make trans or gender-expansive singers feel uncomfortable, unsafe, or unwelcome in a choral ensemble. It is the responsibility of the teacher-conductor to act as allies and supports to minoritized populations. Because the commenter is cisgender and thus part of the dominant group, they may see any potential change to the group, especially if the student values women's spaces, as a threat to their identity and the things they value. For cisgender women who may see trans and gender-expansive rights as a threat to women's spaces, it is important to remember that both cisgender women and trans and gender-expansive individuals are oppressed by patriarchal ideals, and spaces such as women's and treble choirs can be spaces in which those ideals are challenged.

Although a number of singers acknowledged that the name and classification of the ensemble may be inherently exclusive of gender-expansive individuals, they also felt that the environment itself was centered on inclusion. "I think that the actual class environment is very inclusive and accepting, but I can imagine people limiting and excluding themselves from the course based on the name alone" (Anonymous Survey, 11/6/2020). One singer highlighted that "new students who aren't aware of the atmosphere might not feel [included]. The name itself isn't inclusive, but the group is" (Anonymous Survey, 11/6/2020). Overall, many students felt there was a disconnect between the name of the ensemble and the environment Megan and the singers were trying to foster. The sentiments surrounding inclusion show that while some may

see the ensemble name as simply a name, words have the profound ability to shape our understanding. Marketing is an essential part of creating an environment in which students of a variety of identities feel safe and seen.

Changes to the Women’s Choir

Megan and the women’s choir singers engaged in a number of small and large group discussions to review the ensemble name and policies to determine if they were aligned with their choir’s ideals. Throughout the process, Megan and the students often referred to the project outcomes as “for now” solutions and acknowledged that the changes they were currently implementing may not work for the ensemble in the future. The following sections address the name of the choir, ensemble bio, website description, course syllabus, course catalog, membership policies, repertoire, and the logistics of these changes at the school and university levels.

The Name

After going through individual student responses and engaging in small and large group discussions, the members of the choir, in conjunction with their professor, decided that they would no longer be called “women’s choir” because it did not fit their current demographic and because it could be a barrier for trans and gender-expansive singers who wanted to sing in the ensemble. Although the choir wanted to continue conversations about women’s issues, they did not want the ensemble to change to a feminine name—such as “Bella Voce”—because they felt a feminine name still implied a women’s ensemble, which they wanted to deemphasize. Students debated whether the group’s name should be tied to the mission of the ensemble—such as “Intersectional Singers”—but decided to go with a more generalized choir name—like LU

Undivided—to show their dedication to an open space while allowing for the mission and focus of the ensemble to evolve over time.

Ensemble Biography, Website Description, and Syllabus

Students broke off into five groups to construct an ensemble bio that could be used on the school website and in concert programs. The students sought to describe the membership, typical repertoire sung by the group, typical activities throughout the year, and their dedication to creating a space for singers of a variety of identities. Each of the groups constructed their own description, and the students used a ranked voting system to decide which description they thought was most representative of the ensemble. Megan then took the highest-ranking description and altered it to include some of the thoughts and ideas that were also highlighted by the other groups. The following description is the result of the group work and Megan’s synthesis:

This choir (*formerly known as Women’s Choir*) is a choral ensemble open to all treble voices (soprano/alto). The ensemble requires no audition and welcomes students from all majors and disciplines. The choir sings music from a diverse assortment of composers, time periods, and genres, and engages in equity conversations. We collaborate with LU ensembles, as well as other choirs and artists throughout the state. We are an accepting space for anyone who wishes to join, regardless of your gender, sexuality, race, religion, or musical background. The choir will enhance your own vocal technique and help you become a part of a community during your time at LU. (Artifact, 1/29/2021).

Megan used this course description to inform the objectives and descriptions found within the course syllabus.

Membership

The information provided in the university's course catalog—where students go to register for classes—was limited. Under the “restrictions” section in the course catalogue, it specified that the choir was open to all female students, which Megan and the students felt was not representative of their ensemble's policies. As reflected in the ensemble bio above, the choir determined that they would classify themselves as a treble ensemble because the repertoire typically sung in the choir was meant for Sopranos and Altos. That being said, they also wanted to leave the membership policy open to trans women and gender-expansive singers who sing tenor and bass and would find value being in a space that focused intersectional feminist and social justice issues.

The students did not come to a consensus about whether they wanted or were comfortable with cisgender men singing soprano or alto in their ensemble. Although some students thought excluding men was counter to their goals of inclusion, others had negative experiences with cisgender men, such as feeling like they could not speak their mind around men or that they had been victims of sexual assault. Some students' concern with excluding cisgender men was that there was no longer a men's choir on campus, meaning that the former women's choir was the only non-auditioned curricular choir on campus. Students worried that the university's ensemble hierarchy could leave cisgender men in a position where they either had no choir to sing in, or they were required to sing in the auditioned mixed ensemble, which was more of a time and financial commitment. In conversations with Megan, she revealed that “if you're a tenor or bass, there is a strong likelihood you will be placed into the auditioned mixed choir” (Interview, 1/14/2021).

Over the years, the choir has had a number of cisgender male assistant conductors who are undergraduates in music education. Although Megan has not had them sing in the ensemble, she sees their ability to be assistant conductors in the ensemble as “a non-negotiable” (Interview, 1/22/2021) and an essential part of their degree program as they prepare to be potential conductors of women’s and treble ensembles down the road. Megan acknowledged the complex and nuanced nature of men being in a space traditionally set aside for women, but with regards to cisgender men acting as assistant conductors, she wanted to include them, “if it’s the right person at the right point of time” (Interview, 1/22/2021). Beyond that, she wanted to keep the membership policies open to allow for the ensemble to consider cisgender men participating in the choir down the road.

Logistics of Change and Next Steps

After working with the women’s choir to craft new language for the course catalog, syllabus, ensemble bio, and new name, Megan worked with the director of choral activities so ensure that the language and style were consistent with the ensembles at her university. Afterwards, she brought the change to a faculty meeting to have it approved by the School of Music. Once that was finalized, it went through a two-committee process as the college, which would ensure that everything was changed at the university level for the Fall of 2021 and the university course catalogues moving forward.

As the changes went through the proper committees, Megan felt that the next step was to check in with the “point people for the typical student who’s in the school of music” (Interview, 3/15/2021) such as advisors, voice teachers, and other faculty. Because most students join the ensemble by word of mouth, she wanted to make sure the people who have the most direct

student contact understood the change, why the changes had been made, and who was eligible to sing in the ensemble.

At multiple points in the project, Megan reached out to the head of the university's LGBT resource center with the hope that they would have been a part of the choir's process. Although she had established a relationship with the center and its director in the past, the center had recently undergone a change in leadership, and although she reached out to the new head of the resource center, she never heard back from them. Even though they were not able to be a part of the process, she still intended to inform them of the project, the end results, and try to open the door for feedback, conversations with the choir in the future, or a musical collaboration at an event put on by the LGBT resource center.

Project Reflections

Student Reflections

At the end of the project, I asked the singers if any students would be interested in doing a one-on-one interview to share their perspectives on the project itself, the process, and the outcomes, and two students volunteered to meet with me individually. Megan also gave students an opportunity to verbally reflect on the project during our last group work day. I did not have a final anonymous written survey for the students for a variety of reasons. A few students remarked on the value of the anonymous surveys because they felt more freedom to speak their minds. However, toward the end of the project, others—perhaps those who felt their voice was already being heard in a public forum—found the written responses to be taxing, especially in the context of virtual learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. I also knew that their professor was likely going to take a job at another university, and I chose to optimize the time Megan had with the singers rather than having them lose all or part of a class period for written reflections.

Gratitude

In the final class, one of the most consistent themes was gratitude for the project. “I’m thankful Professor Harris was open to this sort of discussion and sort of reforming—not necessarily *reforming*, but maybe clarifying how we see ourselves in this environment” (Group Discussion, 1/29/2021). One music education student shared they “never really knew that gender dysphoria was so prevalent in so many people” (Group Discussion, 1/29/2021). She went on to discuss how the project would transfer to her future professional experience as a choir teacher. “It has really opened my eyes to how diligent you have to be and how thoughtful you have to be, especially since this is a very formative time when people are really learning all these things about themselves” (Group Discussion, 1/29/2021). Another said the topics covered in the project allowed her to not only see the issue from another perspective, but in some ways, to see the issue at all:

I am so grateful that we had the opportunity to have this conversation. I never really thought about the history of gendering in choirs, even though it is something that is so prevalent. I just wasn't as affected by it, and I just didn't even notice it. And so it was really cool that we are able to have this conversation and that you want to create an environment where everybody feels safe. I think that’s what choir’s supposed to be, and I’m really glad that we have this. (Interview, 1/29/2021)

Individuals who are privileged in society may not be aware of the oppressions of others, especially if they have not personally experienced it, witnessed it, or had someone close to them endure it. Although some teacher-conductors may feel the pressure to avoid difficult topics and conversations, comments as made by this student highlight the importance of addressing systems

of oppression to address the needs of minoritized populations and to educate the privileged and powerful.

For one student, the process was meaningful because of actionable outcomes. She expressed her gratitude:

I think that it was really cool that we were actually making progress and it wasn't something that we talked about like maybe twice and then just moved on from, which I think has been a lot of my school history. ... That has especially been the case for big issues like this, where there isn't really a right answer. I think a lot of times I've had people who would just kind of give up, or start a thing, or say that they're going to start it, and just not follow through. So it was really cool that we dedicated so many choir sessions to discussing this and coming up with a plan and figuring out, "Okay, this is what we think, as a group. This is what we individually think. How can we combine these to form a better group ideal?" Because it's so difficult, and there's never going to be a perfect solution, especially since choir is kind of inherently flawed because voice parts and all of that are correlated to gender, even if you take it out of every context imaginable. So I just think that we created a really safe space to discuss these aspects.

(Interview, 2/4/2021)

She went on to say that she appreciated not only the change, but the fact that she was a part of the process:

A lot of times, these are decisions that if anything was done about them at all, they'd be made behind closed doors, so it was really cool that we were having a discussion as a group, especially because just changing the name isn't going to change anything. You need to have the conversations about it to have it mean anything. and so just having like

the floor opened up for us to talk and combine individual responses to create a collective answer was really cool. (Interview, 2/4/2021)

Because of the process of the project, one student who had particular interest in this topic went on to declare a second major in women's and gender studies. She identified herself as someone who was socially active and valued the change that came about in the project:

The other day, I had realized that this history, you know? The fact that we are making those changes to the name, the course description, its *history*. And it feels so cool to be a part of history and to be a part of the conversations that made that change happen. Like, I've never really been a part of major historical events in small scales like this. I just feel super honored. (Interview, 2/4/2021)

Feedback on the Process

Because we did not meet every day, I often started the sessions with a PowerPoint recap of what we had done previous days, what we were going to do today, and what the next steps were. Olivia found those to be helpful, "especially after staring at a computer for like four hours before getting to choir" (Interview, 2/4/2021). I also provided students with documents in a shared folder that included the course catalogue description, ensemble bio, and other written items that they were going to potentially edit and refresh throughout the project, which she found to be helpful. Olivia also appreciated that they were given a variety of ways to disseminate the information and discuss in small and large group settings. Her major critique of the process was that it all took place over Zoom because of the COVID-19 pandemic, but "I don't think I have anything I would change in terms of the experience" (Interview, 2/4/2021).

Moving forward, she wanted to make sure that the choir was in continued conversation about the impact of gender on the ensemble. She was confident that this particular ensemble

would “keep talking about it and it’s not something that’s like, ‘Okay! We’re done now! We can just be done!’ But I think that might be a concern if I was with any other groups” (Interview, 2/4/2021). Her desire to continue discussing gender in choir was based on the fact that “there isn’t a perfect answer, and the group evolves based on current members. ... It’s important to recognize that the answer might differ from what future members of our ensemble need, and that’s okay! We can always make changes” (Interview, 2/4/2021). She also wanted to make sure that the students were able to articulate why the choir was no longer a women’s choir and to voice that “it’s not just a name,” (Interview, 2/4/2021) but also a change in policy and philosophy.

Another student appreciated that there was opportunity to reflect on the group conversations, both verbally and in writing. At one point in the semester, she voiced that she was experiencing “a lot of burnout” (Interview, 2/4/2021), likely because of the global COVID-19 pandemic, and that the anonymous surveys at one point got overbearing. “When we got to all the surveys, I was like, ‘oh my gosh, *another one?*’ ... But that could just be how my mental health was. But looking back, I know those are really helpful, especially for research purposes” (Interview, 2/4/2021). Although students only did two anonymous surveys throughout the project, they often required substantial response on the part of the students. In the future, I would find ways to incorporate single written responses throughout class or have a different question for the students at the end of class that required one minute rather than 15 minutes.

She went on to highlight that some of the discussions that had the most diversity of opinion were the ones in which I wasn’t there as a researcher. “A lot of people had, I guess, more comfort, maybe in talking about their actual feelings because they didn’t maybe want to upset you or set someone else off” (Interview, 2/4/2021). Throughout the project, I noticed that while

the group discussions did have variability of opinion, they often gravitated toward a more homogenous train of thought. In looking through the transcripts, there were times where I may have had a stronger response to some students' responses, either because they aligned with my personal biases or because of how they were articulated by the students. As a researcher, I understand that my relationship with the students is limited by our interactions throughout the project and that they will not have the same relationship with me as they do with each other and their professor, which only encourages me to reexamine the ways that I utilize anonymous responses throughout my research and teaching. As an educator, this feedback also encourages me to work more actively to make sure all my students feel that I am processing and acknowledging their individual viewpoints and making sure they feel seen and heard in my classroom throughout my verbal feedback.

Advice for Others

Throughout the project, some students voiced how difficult the process was because there was no single answer that worked for all people. When I asked the students what advice they would give to others who were considering going through a change in their ensemble name, course and choir descriptions, and membership policies, one student advised patience:

Don't focus on looking for a right answer, because there isn't one, and there's no way to make it perfect. A lot of us performers, singers, *are* perfectionists, and there's no way to achieve perfection in this, and everybody's answer is going to be different. Everybody's emotions are going to be different. So don't look for the perfect answer. Look for what is right for you, as a group. (Interview, 2/4/2021)

She also stressed the value of actively listening and processing what each person in the choir has to say:

Listen to *listen*, not just to respond. I think that was a big part of why this was so successful. We would not have been able to get anywhere without having a discussion. ... Without having a group conversation where we were listening to each other and taking their feedback, we would not have gotten anywhere. (Interview, 2/4/2021)

Another student focused on acknowledging the humanity of and seeing good in others through the process:

Be patient, and be open, because not everyone shares these viewpoints—which is, you know, sad. but it's necessary, because they're humans. They're *humans* that just want to feel included and have friends and have a space that they can call their like safe space. ... So to anyone who might feel that kind of hesitation towards this topic, I would also just say, *please* think about these other humans, because they have feelings, too, just like you and me, and they want to have friends and they want to be included and not feel like aliens in their own skin. (Interview, 2/4/2021)

The students' advice stressed the importance of communication, active listening, and keeping an open mind. Many of the students who responded, however, were individuals who identified themselves as cisgender women. Those who are privileged may be in a more advantageous position to work through difficult conversations, particularly in comparison to individuals whose rights are being debated. Teacher-conductors must approach difficult conversations such as these with care and provide adequate education, reflection, and structure to ensure a safe space for minoritized individuals.

Professor Harris's Reflections

Women's Spaces and Women's/Treble Choirs

Through conversations with students, Megan and the singers of the LU women's choir

addressed what they initially felt was a juxtaposition of addressing women's issues in a space that was not exclusively made up of cisgender women:

It seemed like we could come up with a name that didn't have "women" in it, and come up with a description indicating that we would talk about women's empowerment and issues of social justice, related to women's rights, but not have women in the title. And I wasn't sure how that would look in the beginning of this project—like, would my view change? Would I still want it to have "women" in the title? Would I not want it? What will the students want?—but I like that we were able to craft the course description in a way that lets people know the types of conversations we have and the type of repertoire we sing, but also gets women out of the title for those singers who, if they don't know what the asterisk means, or if they don't look at it close enough, would immediately not look for more information from the ensemble. (Interview, 3/15/2021)

As I have interacted with choristers and choir teacher-conductors about inclusion in choral ensembles, I have encountered a number of individuals who want to prioritize gender inclusion while fearing a sense of loss for gendered spaces and the value that they can bring. Especially since Megan had positive and empowering experiences in women's choirs, I asked her if she was concerned about a sense of loss for herself or the students with regards to the choir no longer being explicitly female-centric:

Oh, I was definitely concerned about that. Because I think so many of the students articulated that women's spaces are still important to them—and for me, as well—and so, removing that, when thinking about that at the onset of this project, was challenging for me to grapple with. But, again, I think, for me, a lot that I have learned is that those two can intersect, right? That they're not at odds with one another. You can have an ensemble

that doesn't have “women” in a title that is a treble ensemble, and it can intersect with themes of social justice, especially women’s issues and women’s empowerment. And that just because you have an ensemble that maybe is not exclusively female singers, that there's still a need and a desire to shape repertoire and conversations around women's empowerment. The two aren't unrelated or that they need to be separated, that they can still intersect in a really meaningful way for the singers, all of the singers, from an educational and empowerment standpoint. You don't have to have one without the other. (Interview, 3/15/2021)

Megan’s viewpoints emphasize that minoritized communities need not be pitted against one another, but rather than work in conjunction with one another. For the former women’s choir, they concluded that they could continue to discuss both women’s issues as well as those of other minoritized identities, perhaps even leading the group to new and important literature and discussions.

Men in Treble Choirs

As Megan and the singers worked on the choir name, course description, and ensemble bio, they left everything open to allow for men to be considered for membership down the road. For now, Megan is comfortable addressing the topic as it becomes relevant. “I don’t anticipate it happening often, but when or if it does, I think it’s about listening to and communicating with that particular student and group singers. For now, I would approach it case-by-case” (Interview, 3/15/2021). Given that some students voiced discomfort around male peers, Megan’s approach allows for her to consider the students in the room, the student considering joining the ensemble, and the greater context of the music department to determine the best musical experience for cisgender men who may be interested in singing in a treble ensemble.

Prioritizing Communication

From the outset of the study, Megan was adamant that students would be a part of the conversation. By making space for students to share their perspectives, Megan and the students were able to learn that while students may have felt like they had a shared experience, they did not necessarily share the same opinions about the group and the project:

Their views and understandings were so varied which was helpful for me to know. It confirmed that, “No, I can't just make this decision on my own, and one single student can't, either, because the spectrum of where they all fell in terms their knowledge and opinions. From assuming that every voice in the ensemble was female, to assuming that everyone wants a space for women's empowerment, to assuming that nobody would be open to having a cis male in the ensemble. They were all over the place in terms of what they knew and what they wanted from the ensemble. (Interview, 3/15/2021)

The value that Megan placed on student perspectives provided an invaluable framing for this project with regards to discussion and outcomes. By taking the time to get to know students' backgrounds and positions, she and I were able to in turn provide students with the necessary background and vocabulary to move forward in the most informed way possible.

Megan reflected on her role in creating a safe space for minoritized students to feel seen and heard in her choir. She paid particular attention to students' concerns that trans and gender-expansive singers may not feel safe or welcome in the ensemble. Megan wondered if Zoom contributed to students not feeling safe because they were lacking more intimate relationships from in-person classes. “If we were in person and really could craft that intimate space where people could really share what was on their mind, maybe they would have felt differently about sharing with others” (Interview, 3/15/2021). In the anonymous surveys, a few students voiced

that they felt they couldn't share their opinions openly in class because they either did not understand or support trans and gender-expansive issues. For students who may not have felt safe, Megan and I both re-learned the need to be explicit about our desire to be allies and our dedication to creating inclusive spaces.

I can say this is a safe space where people can share what they think, but I think it depends on the students' understanding and if *they* feel like it's a safe space. And so maybe if it's not safe for those students, written responses can be a platform to articulate their thoughts anonymously—I think that was key. (Interview, 3/15/2021)

One of the places that both Megan and I struggled was engaging students who felt like they were “walking on eggshells” (Anonymous Survey, 11/16/2020) or were in an environment centered on “political correctness” (Anonymous Survey, 11/16/2020). Given that some of the students felt there were comments that were transphobic, we both brainstormed, with limited success, on ways to engage students with potentially problematic views without doing it at the expense of minoritized student populations. Megan reflected:

I wonder if those students in those written reflections felt heard just by being able to say their opinions. I mean, let's be explicit here: those reflections were sort of a rub against inclusion—which I'm of course open to hearing and I want to know where my students fall. ... I wonder if written response is the way that they would be able to talk about it because they don't feel like they can. (Interview, 3/15/2021)

Throughout the project, multiple students appreciated the opportunity to write things down in addition to group discussion, saying things such as “it felt very equalizing,” “I feel like a wide range of opinions were represented,” and that writing “help[s] more shy people voice their opinions” (Anonymous Survey, 11/16/2020). For the student that said they struggled to get

“onboard with the gender conversation” and feeling like they were “walking on eggshells,” they also appreciated being able to write things down as a way to feel heard, as well, saying “Since I can be in the minority opinion, some of my specific feedback has been only possible in these anonymous surveys. They’re incredibly helpful” (Anonymous Survey, 11/16/2020).

Although Megan was satisfied with the ensemble’s work and the “for now” decisions they had made, she felt one of the greatest challenges facing her in the future was simply talking about difficult topics with students:

I still think having challenging conversations is hard. And I think each one is different from the next. ... These conversations are hard because you don’t want to mess it up, and you don’t want to say something wrong—and you want to use the right language.

(Interview, 3/16/2021)

The project had musical implications for the students, such as the type of music the ensemble sang with regards to voicing and topic, but Megan also considered the broader implications and impact that the project could have on the lives and futures of the students:

I hope going through these conversations that they’ve ... put new tools in their toolbox in terms of conversing on challenging topics, just giving them more verbiage and language and ideas and confidence and listening skills to be able to move through society in a

helpful way. (Interview, 3/15/2021)

By using choir as a means to discuss inclusion and social action with students, Megan provided students with what they described as a unique opportunity to discuss topics that are sensitive and often taboo. “Inclusion technically is not a musical goal,” I said to Megan. “It *is* a music goal,” she replied. “It’s just different than tuning and phrasing.” (Megan Interview #5)

Allyship and Inclusion

Megan and I talked about allyship and that although we would like to think of ourselves as allies, “maybe the marginalized group can determine whether or not, you know?” (Interview, 3/15/2021). As white, cisgender women, we also reflected on how allyship can easily become a form of self-help rather than advocacy for others, at times centering “how can I feel better?” rather than, “how can I center the needs and priorities of people less privileged than I am?” (Interview, 3/15/2021).

For Megan, the students helped her learn that being an ally requires being clear about one’s positionality:

I think, for me, I don't know that this would be a challenge, necessarily, but I wonder if it would have helped for me to share a little bit more of my personal reflection from the start, like a little bit more of where my heart was, where my mind was. I didn't because I didn't want to influence what the group thought, but I think, with all of the knowledge that you shared and all of the discussions—these are strong-minded students and I don't think if I would have shared that from the beginning, that it would have influenced them, because I think they care about what they care about, and not. So I wonder if it would have just been helpful for them to hear it sooner. And especially the conversation about being an ally. The fact that that wasn't clear to some students, that made me so sad, and letting them know sooner in the project could have been helpful for some. (Interview, 3/15/2021)

Megan has made a dedication over the years to move away from explicitly referring to the choir members by gender—“women,” or “girls”—and moving toward terms such as

“sopranos” and “singers.” Although the choir is moving away from being classified by gender, Megan felt there was still more work she needed to do regarding gender within the ensemble:

This project helped me realize, of course, not to assume that everyone in the women's choir identified as female. But even more so to not assume that students are ready to talk about their pronouns. I've invited students to introduce themselves by including their pronouns. But for some, that's not something they're ready to share. And so it's about finding the appropriate balance of that language. Asking people to share their pronouns can signal an inclusive space, but for others, that can also be a moment of, “I'm not ready to share my pronouns. I don't know what my pronouns are today.” So figuring out what that means for an ensemble. (Interview, 3/15/2021)

In recent years, cisgender individuals have begun introducing themselves with and including their pronouns in email signatures and screennames on video conferencing apps in an attempt to normalize the practice for trans and gender-expansive people. With a similar intention, some groups such as workplaces have begun asking everyone to share their pronouns at the beginning of meetings without considering that some individuals may not be ready to share. As a teacher, I began the year by sharing not just my pronouns, but also my other identities that meant the most to me and encouraged students to share their identities that may mean the most to them—such as race, ethnicity, religion, sexuality. That practice helped normalize the use of pronouns in my classroom, and it also allowed for me and the students to get to know each other more and the parts of the identities that meant the most to them. Teacher-conductors can consider a variety of strategies such as the one detailed above to allow trans and gender-expansive students to share their pronouns if they feel safe or comfortable to do so.

Megan hopes that the name of the course and the course description will send “a very clear signal of the type of ensemble we are” (Interview, 3/15/2021). Although Megan has accepted a job at a different university, she intends to share the project at the beginning of the semester “for the foreseeable future” (Interview, 3/15/2021) so the students are aware of the changes, why they took place, and how the decisions help to continually frame the discourse surrounding the ensemble.

National Conversation

As Megan has talked with her choral friends and colleagues, she felt that “choir directors [want] to make changes and be more inclusive... and a lot of people are wanting to make these changes” (Interview, 3/15/2021). As Megan reflected on the national conversation surrounding inclusion in traditionally single-gender ensembles, she felt that “the tides have changed, and I think they’re going to continue to change” (Interview, 3/15/2021). Although Megan had limited experience in women’s and treble ensembles prior to her doctorate, her perception of the women’s choir experiences were that they were seen as less prestigious ensembles and that the singers did not enjoy being in those choirs (Gauthier, 2005; O’Toole, 1998; Wilson, 2013). After singing in a women’s choir both as a grad student and a member of a community choir, “it really shifted my understanding of what a women’s choir could be” (Interview, 3/15/2021) in terms of the type and quality of literature that was sung, as well as the empowering discourses of the women’s choir music.

In previous years, Megan noticed that the attitude surrounding the women’s choir at her university was also shifting as students began to voluntarily enroll in the ensemble even when they had made the mixed ensemble. For the next (2021-2022) academic year, the director of choral activities at her university also added an auditioned treble ensemble to the choir options to

allow for treble singers to have a more select and advanced choral experience within the music department. Megan believes this also has the potential to boost students' perceptions about treble choirs in her university. In an article about female singers in choral ensembles, O'Toole (1998) advocated for choir programs to add an auditioned women's ensemble to provide female singers with more advanced choral opportunities in programs disproportionately represented by women. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, however, Megan has heard some of the negative attitudes that she has sought to combat work their way back in the ensemble. She believes the perceptions are two-fold: one, because the students have not been able to have the full choir experience because of the pandemic, and two, "freshmen are coming in with the assumption that it's the lesser of the ensembles. ... There's still a stigma in high schools, for whatever reason" (Interview, 3/15/2021). In Major's (2017) study, a collegiate conductor also hypothesized that negative viewpoints about treble and women's choirs stem from negative experiences singers may have had in their high school choir programs. O'Toole (1998) argued that common elements of choral programs such as sexist repertoire and ensemble hierarchies contribute to a culture that perpetuates inequities for female singers.

Megan believes one of the reasons that women's and treble choirs are beginning to be viewed in a more positive light is because of the quality of literature that has come out for women's and treble choirs:

I feel like there's that conversation of, "Oh, women's choirs only sing about love and flowers and beauty and relationships." While that was true five years ago, ten years ago, and prior, it's not as prevalent anymore, especially with Twenty-first century composers of treble choir music. There's so much more empowering music today. While that

sentiment was true even just a short couple of years ago, I'm not sure that's the case anymore. (Interview, 3/15/2021)

Advice for Choirs Considering Inclusion in Traditionally Single-Gender Choirs

Ideally, Megan would not have conducted the project over Zoom. She felt the students may have formed closer bonds in person as they discussed difficult conversations, but also acknowledged that “Zoom is a platform that allows people to put stuff in the chat and reflect differently than if they were in person” (Interview, 3/15/2021).

Megan appreciated having me as a collaborator throughout the process to help develop discussion questions and process questions as they came up. She also appreciated the presentations and resources that I provided to the students so that “those students who couldn't speak to it at all now have the language” (Interview, 3/15/2021). Because of the university requirements for submitting course changes, she valued having the director of choral activities as a reference point for deadlines, which helped us determine an appropriate timeline to enact change for the following school year. She said that “unless a director is really confident... they should reach out to someone to help with the planning and conversations and the information that needs to be shared” (Interview, 3/15/2021). The resources that Megan and I developed can be found in the Appendix F.

Summary

Megan and the women's choir students spent three months (November through January) over the course of two semesters considering inclusion in their women's choir. Although Megan and many of the students found value in women's spaces, they determined that the name “women's choir” did not align with their group goals and ideals, and they chose to move away from a gender classification for their choir to create a space that was more inclusive of trans and

gender-expansive singers. The singers of the former women's choir collaborated to determine a new name, course description, ensemble bio, and membership policies. Megan emphasized that the decision was a "for now" choice that could be changed down the road as determined by the needs of future conductors and students.

CHAPTER 6: CHRIS MILLER: UPBRINGING, MUSICAL JOURNEY, AND DAWSON STATE UNIVERSITY'S MEN'S CHOIR

Chris is a white, Christian male in his early 40s. Currently, he teaches choral conducting and directs the school's men's choir, which functions both as a part of the music department and as a student organization at Dawson State University. I will detail how the course and student organization function both as united and independent entities in Chapter 7. This chapter will introduce you to Chris Miller, an assistant professor of choral conducting at Dawson State University. I will detail elements of his upbringing and how gender influenced the way he interacted with his peers at school, and his recruitment to and participation in choir. I will then walk you through his undergraduate degree, journey to pursuing choral conducting as a career, his graduate coursework, and his life post-grad school. Chris will share how gender and broader issues of social justice have influenced his pedagogy and his philosophy about the choral arts.

Throughout the next two chapters, you will also hear from three students: Matthew, a white, cisgender male, engineering student, and president of the men's choir; Jimmy, a gay, Vietnamese, cisgender male, business major, and the diversity, equity, and inclusion chair for the student organization; and Daniel, a white, straight, cisgender male who is studying English Language and Literature.

Chris Miller

I met Chris for the first time over Zoom. As someone who has spent a large part of the past year-and-a-half participating in virtual learning, I'm keenly aware of the sometimes awkward and impersonal nature of making first-time connections with teachers and students over Zoom. I'm also naturally shy, so was nervous about interviewing someone I had never met and had never been able to observe teaching in person. There's something about Chris, though,

that makes him really easy to talk to, to connect with, to share a little bit of your heart with. As I got to know Chris and his context, he was quick to respond in kind. I asked him about how the COVID-19 pandemic was impacting him at his university, and the conversation quickly evolved into talking about my context. It became apparent that I was not so much interviewing Chris as we were mutually coming to understand each other. Even without knowing Chris, I know he is asking me not out of obligation or the niceties that come with small talk, but out of a genuine desire to get to know me, my context, my strengths, and my struggles.

There's something familiar about Chris, but I couldn't quite put my finger on what, until Chris shared, "At one point, I was thinking, maybe seminary, maybe becoming a pastor, or something like that." Chris's mannerisms embody some of the qualities that remind me of religious leaders from my childhood—the familiar rhythm of his sentence structures, the inflection of his speech, the intentional pauses and use of his hands for emphasis and to drive the point home.

I'm drawn in from the beginning. When I talk, he makes eye contact with me—something I still haven't learned how to do on Zoom—and makes me feel heard, seen, understood. His brand of leadership is not so much leader as it is counselor. His philosophy centers not on a singular answer, but rather working under the truths of love, acceptance, and support. Instead of preaching to the choir, he teaches to the choir.

As we talk about teaching during COVID-19—which has been an immense struggle for music teachers—he talks as if it's another year. "My mantra all along has been 'cheerful and flexible,' Things are going to keep changing, so we might as well make the most of it, and that's all we can do." When talking about inclusion, it feels like "cheerful and flexible" are also at the

center of his philosophy. “Things are going to keep changing, so we might as well make the most of it, and that’s all we can do.” (Memo, December 10, 2020)

Background

Growing Up

Chris grew up in the West in a town that centered around the local university—much like the town in which he currently lives and teaches. He described himself as “a very typical kid, in the sense of sports and being cool and popular and doing all those things. That was my number one” (Interview, 11/9/2020). He always had a love for music, but especially in his adolescence, he “never dared get involved in a choir because that was never perceived, in my day, as a cool thing to do” (Interview, 11/9/2020). I was curious if the concern for public image was the case for all students or if it was related to gender:

I think it was specific to me being a boy, in particular. And to be perceived as strong and successful, it was through athletics, and through kind of being a jerk, you know? Just kind of mean enough to make people think you're a cool kid—which, I mean how awful is that? Ugh. *Yuck*. (Interview, 11/9/2020)

For Chris, his number one priority in middle school was “chasing that popularity life” (Interview, 11/9/2020). Although a love of music is important when enrolling in choir, peers and teachers also play a vital role when it comes to boys enrolling in choral ensembles (Kennedy, 2002; Nannen, 2017). As an 8th grader, the opinions of his peers and their perceptions of masculinity were the primary reasons Chris was hesitant to sing in a public setting.

Chris enrolled in a Spanish course in 8th grade. At one point, he recalled the teacher having them sing a song about verb conjugations. After hearing Chris sing, the Spanish teacher—who was also the choir teacher—attempted to recruit Chris for choir. Chris adamantly

rejected his teacher's attempts, telling him frankly, "Under *no circumstances* will I be joining choir. No way. Absolutely not" (Interview, 11/9/2020). Eventually, the teacher made a last-ditch effort: Chris could recruit some of his male friends for an exclusive after-school choir where the teacher would coach them through one song. None of his peers would need to know. If he liked it, he could join choir, and if he didn't, the teacher would stop trying to get him to be a part of the school's music program.

Chris projected apathy outward but inwardly was delighted at the prospect. He agreed to his teacher's compromise. Chris went on to recruit some of his friends, and after school, his teacher taught them the 50s doo-wop song, "Silhouettes" by The Rays. Despite the students' initial apprehension, they continued their rehearsals with the teacher. "We were all feeling like we were too cool for school, but we were all really enjoying this" (Interview, 11/9/2020). One day, their teacher shared that they had been invited to sing at a middle school choral festival that would include choirs from the entire county. "And here we are, this little clandestine group of eighth-grade boys and suddenly we've been invited to sing in front of all of the middle school students in the county? We were like, 'Okay!'" (Interview, 11/9/2020). In listening to Chris describe the experience, it was apparent that this performance was among his most transformative and defining musical experiences:

And then we went out. I literally remember it like it happened yesterday. We walked out on that stage. It was the first time I had ever felt stage lights on me. I could see that the auditorium filled with 600 kids, the heat of those lights. And he had given me the solo at the middle of the chorus, and it came time. We're out there, we have our little doo-wop sway, and it came time for me to walk out and sing my solo. I sang my solo and starting to make my way back in the little semi-circle, and the crowd just went *crazy*. And I was

like “That's it! I'm *hooked*. I'm doing choir for the rest of my life. This is the greatest thing. This is the coolest thing.” (Interview, 11/9/2020)

The previous quote shows that the experience, as well as the mentorship provided by his teacher and the affirmation he received from his peers, were pivotal in his decision to continue singing in choral ensembles. Chris's retelling of this memory speaks to the important role that mentors play in creating meaningful experiences and long-lasting memories for their students.

As Chris relayed his initial performance experience, I was curious about the parallels between his love for athletics and the performing arts:

Jessica: Do you feel like there was any connection between the social status of being an athlete and the positive response you received during your performance for the county choir festival, in terms of the praise?

Chris: That's interesting. That's a great question. I *do* think that the bottom line was that affirmation. It was like a sense of being confirmed and like, “Okay, so maybe I'm wrong. I can be an arts-oriented person and not have to dip down on the cool scale,” you know? Have my cake and eat it too, a little bit. But it worked for me. I don't know if when you're a young, athlete kid, understanding those big sense of crowds. And that's not something you necessarily have as a sports kid. But suddenly it was like, “Whoa, that was overwhelming. And that was really *cool*,” getting that, hearing that sound, that applause.

Jessica: Affirmation is a powerful tool.

Chris: You know, like Lady Gaga: I live for the applause. (Interview, 11/9/2020)

For Chris, affirmation was key in building a lifelong love of singing, but the essential draw to participating in choir at all was gendered in nature. “It was singing with my buddies, right? It certainly kind of was born in that singing-with-the-guys kind of experience. That was my hook”

(Interview, 11/9/2020). Chris's experiences with friendship and singing are mirrored in research that details male singers and their desire for camaraderie in singing (Freer, 2009a), a pressure to conform to masculine ideals (Nannen, 2017), and a desire to fit in with their peers (Bannerman, 2016). For boys in secondary schools, the opinions of their male peers may have the greatest pull in terms of their participation in choir (Nannen, 2017). All of the above social influences impacted Chris's enrollment, engagement, and enjoyment of singing and choral ensembles.

Chris reflected back fondly on his choir teacher and the profound impact he had on his musical tastes and his journey to becoming a collegiate choral conductor:

I have endless gratitude for the influence and the persistence of my choir teacher. And I was one of hundreds, *hundreds* of students whose lives he changed because of his intentionality as an educator and his unwillingness to give up on kids. So I sit here today, and I just still feel so much gratitude for him. He's long since passed away, but that story is an important story because I think beginnings shape kind of where you go and how you develop. I've always had a huge love of the acapella form, especially more like the vocal band. And single-gendered male acapella groups have been something that I've always been into for as long as I can remember, and that was something that always had a big influence on me. (Interview, 11/9/2020)

Chris's relationship with his first choir teacher demonstrates the positive impact choir teachers of traditionally single-gender ensembles have on addressing social norms related to gender and fostering an environment that is open and accepting for adolescent singers (Ramsey, 2013; Sweet, 2010). The influence of his teacher is what propelled him to continue singing through high school, college, and in turn, pursue a music career.

As Chris discussed the value of men's choirs in his adolescent experience, his perspectives are reflected in research on secondary choir programs. Some researchers have found that all-male ensembles contribute to positive associations with singing for male singers (Dame, 2011; Ramsey, 2013; Sweet, 2010). Researchers have detailed teachers' beliefs that single-gender ensembles reduce classroom management issues (Carp, 2004, Dame, 2019; Williams, 2012). For example, the participants in Carp's (2004) study believed that "boys are much more productive working in a situation WITHOUT girls" (p. 29, emphasis in original) and that they "improve faster" (p. 30) in single-gender settings. The people who responded to Dame's (2011) survey tied positive outcomes in men's choirs to singers' increased likelihood to engage in "more risk-taking" in men's choirs that that through "camaraderie, teamwork, [a] sense of male bonding, and improve[d] self-esteem" (p. 34).

College

Chris went on to study religion in college and continued singing through his undergraduate degree. At his college, gendered choirs continued to be a part of his choral experience:

In my alma mater—still today and back then—all first-year students who audition and make a choir sing in either the Men's Choir, which is all tenors and basses, or the Women's Choir, which is all sopranos and altos. And so again, formationally for me, that was a part of how the structure is at my alma mater. And I think philosophically, there was and still is kind of the idea of building the skill sets for these students in these single-gendered ensembles. The language has changed, where it is now using the language of tenor and bass, soprano and alto, as opposed to females and males, but the purpose has kind of continued to serve in a similar manner. (Interview, 11/9/2020)

Several studies have drawn these parallels about the benefits of traditionally single-gender ensembles. Some of the perceived benefits are musical, such as catering to the individual vocal needs of the singers based on voice type (Dame, 2012, 2019). Others are social, such as program retention and students' willingness, or lack thereof, to take risks in front of peers of the opposite gender (Carp, 2004). It is important to note, however, that each of the previous studies are specific to the adolescence, which is often considered to be an especially sensitive and tumultuous time in people's lives. As such, it can be difficult to draw correlations between research studying the specifics of the social pressures adolescents experience to collegiate choral experiences.

Post-College

After college, Chris started an a cappella group with the hopes of singing professionally. He also considered entering the seminary, which led him to working at a church. After some time working there, it became apparent that the church needed a new choir director. Knowing his musical background, the church asked if he would lead the choral ensemble. Although he had never conducted a choir, he agreed. Working with that choir was another pivotal moment in Chris's musical journey:

I call it the miracle of the downbeat, where I remember that first rehearsal so clearly. My hands come down, and that sound came out, and I was like, "*Whoa!*" It was another hook for me. It was another moment where I was like, "This is amazing." And kind of from that point on, my whole world shifted in terms of my work and my kind of vocational identity, and I suddenly was doing full-time music for this church and directing the music program and worship services. (Interview, 11/9/2020)

Chris's first draw to music—singing with his male friends in middle school—was related to gender and was key to him engaging in music. When he conducted his first choral ensemble, the draw to conducting was not related to gender, but rather musical reasons. Connecting to the music as a conductor and a leader opened his perspective about the possibilities of working as a full-time musician.

In addition to his work at the church, he also began a short-term assignment as a teacher of a 9th and 10th grade boys' choir and an 9th grade women's choir at an area high school. Reflecting on the gendered nature of those ensembles, Chris believes, "philosophically, splitting up the choirs by gender was for behavioral reasons" (Interview, 11/9/2020). The makeup of those ensembles was one that he walked into with the program, rather than a decision that he made on his own:

It was explicitly said to me, that they didn't like their male and female students combined as freshman or sophomores because they don't do well behaviorally when they're in the same room. And it's like, okay, is that true? Or is that what we say? It would be a fascinating thing to really interrogate that assumption. (Interview, 4/4/2021)

Much of the literature surrounding the benefits and rationale of traditionally single-gender ensembles are related to men's and tenor-bass choruses (Carp, 2004; Dame, 2012, 2019; Palant, 2014; Phillips, 2003). Scholarship focusing on the needs of women's choirs work under the assumption the female singers are often undervalued in choral programs (Carp, 2004; Dame, 2019; Gackle, 2011; O'Toole, 1998; Spurgeon, 2012). Research concerning the effectiveness of single-gender educational settings is varied in results. In studies that have examined success in schools segregated by gender, success appears to not be attached to gender, but rather smaller classroom sizes, quality teachers, parent involvement, and proper funding (American Civil

Liberties Union, n.d.). When the United States Department of Education (2005) conducted a systematic review of single-gender schools, they were unable to show that students in those schools were more successful than their counterparts in gender-inclusive schools. Although some studies specifically look at traditionally single-gender ensembles (Dame, 2011, 2012, 2019; Ramsey, 2013; Sweet, 2010; Sweet & Parker, 2019), it is difficult to determine if the perceived effectiveness of these ensembles is directly correlated to gender segregation.

Chris's evolving philosophy reflects the experiences of many choral conductors who have conflicting feelings about splitting up singers by voice part and/or gender. Although he expressed reservations about splitting students up for behavior reasons, he did acknowledge some of the vocal pedagogy benefits that could emerge from splitting choirs up by voice part:

I also hear a pedagogical rationale where someone would say, I want to develop my tenors and basses independent of my sopranos and altos because it ultimately benefits the choral program, because by the time they're juniors and seniors, they've had specific training that helps them make these choirs better, make our top choirs better, because the tenors and basses were singing independently their first two years. And then I see that in some cases where it is perhaps true. It works. Whether it's because of that or something else, some really great choral programs are built on that model. Going to and working at my alma mater, the whole model is built so all first-year students are divided into gendered choirs. Nobody sings in any choir other than the gendered choirs. There's no exception to that. And that again, fascinating. (Interview, 4/4/2021)

Throughout our conversations, Chris challenged assumptions made in choral music related to pedagogy and interrogated their relationship to gender. Here, Chris's description of the rationales for separating singers by voice type is similar to the pedagogical reasoning used by beginning

band programs to separate students by instrument type (i.e., woodwind and brass). The musical rationales for separating students by voice or instrument type do not necessarily acknowledge the social impacts of organizing programs in ways that are openly or inadvertently related to gender.

Grad School

The combination of his work as a church musician and high school choir teacher made him realize that he wanted to pursue choral conducting as his profession. He went on to grad school. During his grad program, he first began thinking critically about gendered choirs and gender in choral music. While studying for an exam in the hallway, one of his fellow choristers confided in him that she was going to begin her transition to express her gender in a way that reflected her gender identity and internal sense of self:

She counts that year and the way that our director kind of embraced her as a real crossroads and major moment that changed her life. And I felt like I got to be a part of that. I got to see that modeled in our director's leadership. And instantly changing language. That piece, in particular, had so much power. Moving away from the ways of coaching a choir in rehearsal. Like, "Come on, men," or, "I want to hear more mama tone from you, altos," or whatever it might be. Just changing, letting go of all the accepted norms. And he was so intentional about that and so, so good about that so quickly—and yet would trip up, you know? Would get clumsy, because that's part of how we grow.

(Interview, 11/9/2020)

Chris highlighted how essential choir teacher-conductors are in creating an inclusive environment for singers of a variety of gender identities and expressions. As more scholars have studied the intersection of trans and gender-expansive identities with music, it has become apparent that the language music educators use is essential for gender inclusivity (Palkki, 2016,

2017, 2020; Sauerland, 2018). *Blurring the Binary* (Stapleton, 2021), a website founded by trans music educator Melanie Stapleton, is a resource that provides terminology and practical applications for gender inclusivity in the music classroom. Adolescence and early adulthood can be a time for singers to explore their identity exploration, and choir teachers can act as significant mentors for students as they learn more about their gender identity within and outside choral ensembles (Palkki, 2016).

Professional Career

Chris was hired as the artistic director of a high-level, mixed-voice community chorus. While conducting that ensemble, he started to actively pursue his passion of the choral arts as a means for connecting with others:

When I was artistic director of the community chorus, I wanted to take the choir into spaces that wouldn't normally have access to the arts, or specifically that level of artistry. And so a friend of mine was starting a choir with the incarcerated women at a prison. And so kind of from the ground floor of that, I was a part of the process of helping her, supporting her in that, and then bringing my choir in to kind of inspire and create this experience. It was, for me, another way of experiencing the power of taking the arts into those otherwise conceived of as out-of-reach spaces. (Interview, 11/9/2020)

Singing can be a powerful experience for incarcerated individuals, both during and after incarceration. Given the negative stereotypes associated with incarceration, those who are currently or formerly incarcerated may struggle with “reintegration rituals” (Cohen, 2019, p. 108s) such as finding community. Cohen’s (2007) work with choirs in prisons demonstrates how singing can foster social and emotional bonds that can support individuals once they are no longer incarcerated.

Chris joined the faculty at his alma mater, where he conducted the auditioned mixed ensemble and the introductory tenor-bass choir. His school had a period between fall and spring semesters that allows students to take one intensive four-week course on a topic of their choosing. The university initially approached Chris about teaching a music appreciation course. He saw this as an opportunity to propose a course centered around social justice in music. The course itself was inspired by the work he did with his community chorus as they engaged with incarcerated populations. In reflecting back on that experience and how it influenced the course, he said, “This is the kind of thing that I want to awaken students to their justice passion and be intentional about how it intersects with their artistic identity” (Interview, 11/9/2020).

While at this university, Chris conducted the school’s tenor-bass choir—the same choir he sang in during his undergrad and masters. “That was really the first time I had a full-fledged tenor/bass chorus. Even though I did that work in the high school setting prior, that was a short-lived thing. This was far more substantive” (Interview, 11/9/2020). It was in that tenor-bass choir that he had his first experience teaching an openly trans singer:

I had a student who was transgender and sang first tenor in choir. And I remember when he came to audition, he could sing first soprano, but he also could sing, for the most part, the range of first tenor. And so my colleague and I were discussing, “How do we care well for him?” And I think that's really the first question: how do we care well for each student? That, to me, it has to start there—caring for, nurturing that person for who they are, in every way that they express themselves. And so we just said, “You decide where you want to be. You’re a tremendously talented musician and we want you to have the power and the authority to make the choice of where it feels right for you,” you know? Because he was hemming and hawing a bit. Ultimately, he came and sang with me in the

tenor-bass choir, and it was extraordinary to get to learn from him and watch him find that comfort and safety in that space. And really important for me to model that, but then also for to create a culture around which the ensemble itself was going to be embracing. That's also key. (Interview, 11/9/2020)

Music educators have a vital role in creating safe spaces for trans and gender-expansive students (Palkki, 2016; Sauerland, 2018; Silveira & Goff, 2016). As such, choir teachers must develop the skills necessary to honor various gender identities and expressions in their classrooms. There may be times where teachers may not know how to be most respectful to students as they navigate their gender identity in a society that works under the assumption that gender and biology are inextricably linked, and that gender exists as a binary rather than a continuum. In many situations, giving students agency to make their decisions and have their wishes respected is one of the most powerful tools for empowering students in their gender identity and expressions. In the case of Chris, he and his colleague valued a system that empowered the student to sing in the ensemble that best met their musical and social goals at the university.

Professor Miller, the Conductor

Choral Philosophy and Pedagogy

Chris has had a number of experiences over the years that have influenced his pedagogy. Throughout our talks, he talked of teachers he had in the past that made accommodations for students in a variety of settings. One such person was the choir director in his grad program that adjusted his teaching for a trans student in the ensemble:

I think he just became a beautiful model for me so that in my leadership, as I started to have transgender students come into my quote-unquote “male choruses,” I was able to have a reference point to see how to do this well and do this in a loving and caring way

that was nurturing to the student and created a culture that was empowering for everyone. And now, to this day, that's now just part of it for me. Every year, I have transgender students in my male choirs. And it's normal and something that I embrace. (Interview, 11/9/2020)

Chris's choir conductor was dedicated to adjusting his pedagogy to meet the needs of trans and gender-expansive singers. His teacher's leadership through example provided a foundation on which Chris has modeled inclusion in his ensembles. By prioritizing inclusive language, Chris has sought to create an environment in which cisgender students can act as allies and for LGBTQIA+ students to "resist oppression" (Nagoshi, Nagoshi, & Bruzy, 2014, p. 428) in spaces that center on cisheteronormativity.

Choir for Social Justice

Chris's *Music and Social Justice* course "still critically informs my teaching" (Interview, 11/9/2020). His work with the community choir and its performances for incarcerated individuals was also an influential experience that helped form his opinions on choir music's ability to be an agent for social justice:

My first year with Dawson State's men's choir, we made our way down to the federal prison, and I got to take the men's choir there for the first time. The men's choir had never been inside of a prison in its history, and the prison allowed me to bring 70-some singers from DSU into that space to sing a 90-minute program. It was crazy, Jessica. It was so cool. And these guys—watching their eyes open up, just being shocked. They couldn't believe it. And it was so powerful, and everyone's crying, and it was one of those transformative moments. And now we've returned, and we can't *not* do this, you know? It changes the way an organization functions. So the more we use our artistry as a means to

serve the world, the more we use it as a platform to empower for the sake of justice and for the sake of reconciliation and in the ways that artistry has that kind of impact on our society—to provoke and to change and to do those things in us and for the sake of others—sign me up. That's my motivator right there. (Interview, 11/9/2020)

As a grad student, I attended a conference where all attendees visited a prison to watch a performance by a choir made up of individuals who were both incarcerated and those who were not. I recall several students and faculty that were visibly and audibly uncomfortable by the experience. Some openly talked about how much they didn't want to be there. Others cracked jokes as we went through security. I assumed the jokes were a coping mechanism for those who had never been near a prison, but I won't pretend I wasn't bothered by their levity. The choir performed songs by members who reflected on their life experiences. As the conference attendees left the prison, I watched some of those individuals who expressed frustration about attending the performance wiped tears from their eyes and said they were glad to have come. I thought about the many times in my own life where I lacked compassion for people whose experiences were different from my own, only to change my perspective once it impacted someone I personally knew or cared about. I hold these sorts of experiences both with a sense of appreciation and a desire to challenge my instinct to have compassion only after something like incarceration has had a personal impact on my life. I see my own experience reflected in that of my fellow conference attendees and the DSU men's choir members. (Memo, 11/9/2020)

At DSU, Chris and the director of choral activities “have a lot of simpatico” (Interview, 12/10/2020) in their philosophy of music and the role it plays in social justice efforts. For Chris, working with the men's choir “was an opportunity to extend the concept of music for the sake of serving and music for the sake of reaching out and how we can bring our music and context that

would never otherwise have access to it” (Interview, 12/10/2020). In his dedication to using choral music for social justice, Chris strives to go beyond simply talking about diversity, equity, and inclusion. For him, it is essential to embody it through action, as well:

I say to the men’s choir “Listen. We're not going to say anything that we won't back up with action. And if we can't demonstrate through our actions what we are talking about, then we're not going to say it. And we're not going to make it a public statement, this is who we are—well, no, it's not who we are if we can't show it. We can aspire to it.

Aspiring is one thing, but actually doing it is a different thing altogether.” (Interview, 12/10/2020)

For Chris, literature selection is an essential part of moving beyond aspiration and into action. Even before Chris, the choir has a history of engaging in challenging conversations through music, such as racism in the United States. The men’s choir has partnered with local mental health organizations for benefit concerts and to bring light to the importance of mental health, especially in men’s spaces where mental health is a topic often left untouched. After the pandemic, when the men’s choir can sing again for audiences, Chris hopes to do a concert centering on advocacy for refugees. The choir recently participated part in a four-week sexual assault prevention training with a curriculum centered on the responsibility men have in preventing sexual assault.

The singers of DSU’s men’s choir spoke to the importance of the diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts of the ensemble. They, too, have taken the mantle of not simply conceptualizing social justice issues in abstract ways, but using music as a means to engage with them actively. For one member of the men’s choir, literature selection was one of the most actionable ways the choir centered their DEI efforts. “It’s one thing to have a presentation that

talks about how to not be racist. That's all well and good, but we're singing music by Black composers, we're singing social justice songs" (Interview, 2/18/2021). Daniel saw Chris's dedication to DEI work reflected in the culture of the men's choir as a whole:

I think one of the ways that he really kind of walks the walk, in addition to talking to talk with DEI efforts, is that actively engaged and invested with each singers' life. He knows everybody by name. He really makes an effort to connect on individual levels, to know about who they are, about what they care, about what they do, what they study, and what they like to do in their free time, what their family is like. And I think that honestly, for me, that's some of the most important inclusive at work maybe not on a macro organization scale, but sort of that culture that he creates where everyone is personally invested in the success and the happiness and the well-being of everyone else in the choir. That really has been, I think one, of the reasons why men's choir has been such an amazing community for me one while I'm here at school. (Interview, 2/18/2021)

In recent years, some organizations have expanded beyond DEI to include a new letter, 'B'—belonging. Burnette (2019) described diversity, equity, and inclusion as “a different piece of the full human experience” Each of the elements of DEI is necessary for individuals to experience belonging within a given community. For students like Daniel, belonging within an organization like the men's choir is contingent on both the individuals and the group's dedication to DEI efforts.

Traditionally Single-Gender Ensembles

Men's and Tenor-Bass Choirs. Men's choirs may “build and facilitate their camaraderie” with things such as “rowdiness, crude humor, and shenanigans" (Ramsey, 2013), p. 102). For Chris, his connection with men's choirs is not rooted in social ideals that may be

typically associated with masculinity, but rather many of the elements that work in contrast to traditionally masculine traits:

I have always just had a love of and am drawn to that sound of tenors and basses. I just love it. It's the repertoire, and the way those voices work together. It's just something I've always felt super comfortable in—on both sides as a singer and as a director. For me, it's never had that testosterone, masculine [growls] kind of rationale. If anything, it's been more about kind of basking in the beauty of being a group of tenors and basses—and as I would think of it earlier, of men in a room creating something beautiful, in a world where masculinity is expressed not necessarily as beauty. I just think there was something always so impactful, powerful upon me in that. And seeing how the dynamics of how it works out in terms of creating empathy and breaking down a lot of the masculinity norms that our society hands us, and softening the underbelly of your typical college male, you know? I was a byproduct of that, and I think I learned a lot in those spaces. But it was never, for me, this kind of viscera, rah-rah, football guy kind of thing. (Interview, 11/9/2020)

Many of the DSU men's choir members are specifically drawn to the men's choir for that same community of men that drew Chris to singing in 8th grade. Chris sees men's choirs as serving both musical purposes, such as singing tenor-bass repertoire, and social purposes, such as a community of tenors and basses. As a conductor of a collegiate men's choir, he specifically uses that space to encourage singers to engage in topics that are often taboo for men in society, such as mental health and emotional vulnerability.

As the conversation surrounding gender in choral ensembles has become more nuanced, so has Chris's approach, particularly in his desire to use inclusive language, referring to singers in an ensemble setting as "tenors and basses" rather than "men" or "guys."

Over time, my language has evolved, and my desire to create that very broad entry point for anyone who would come and sing for me, regardless of identity. And that they just would feel loved, embraced, safe and secure, and nurtured under the culture of the community and the leadership space that I create. (Interview, 11/9/2020)

Palkki (2016) argued that gendered rehearsal language would be an essential and nuanced topic for discussion in the years to come. Chris's approach to rehearsal language reflects the way discourse surrounding gender has continued to evolve in the choral community. For some trans and gender-expansive signers, the use of gendered language, such as teachers or students referring to a trans male singer as "one of the guys," may be an empowering experience. For others, the use of gendered language may be offensive, hurtful, and a reminder of the cisheteronormativity that is pervasive throughout society (Palkki, 2016). For educators like Chris, it may be seen as most desirable to move to gender-neutral language, such as "students" or "singers" to show their students and community that they do not seek make assumptions about a students' gender identity based on their gender expression in that space.

Women's and Treble Choirs. The majority of Chris's professional experience as a choir conductor has involved working with tenor-bass ensembles and some mixed ensembles. Outside of his brief experience conducting a 9th-grade women's choir, his experience with treble ensembles is limited:

I had always felt a little bit just kind of *meh* about treble choirs. Not because it was anything against sopranos and altos. I think I was always so honed in on that tenor/bass sound that it just didn't *do it* for me, for whatever reason. (Interview, 11/9//2020)

Chris's initial feelings about women's and treble choirs are pervasive in music education. Choral hierarchy related to gender has been a topic of discussion for decades, with scholars such as O'Toole (1998) arguing that female singers are often disadvantaged and undervalued throughout choral programs and in women's and treble ensembles. Singers within and outside of women's and treble ensembles may view these choirs as inferior (Gauthier, 2005; Snow, 2012; Wilson, 2020, 2012, 2013). As Chris was reflecting on the most impactful choral performances he has witnessed, however, he immediately was drawn to a performance by a treble ensemble:

I have been to a bazillion conferences over the course of my life. When we go to those ACDA conferences, in particular, there's moments where something stands out, captures you, that you're like, "I'm never going to forget that, like, ever." And for me, that was actually Sandra Snow and the women's choir from Michigan State. Their performance at that convention, to this day, stands as one of the most compelling musical experiences I've ever been able to receive. It was so overwhelmingly powerful to me. And suddenly I was bowled over by everything that was. I think it kind of was this ignition switch that helped me to kind of realize, like, "Open your mind, Chris. Come on. Excellence and artistry is excellence and artistry—period. Doesn't matter from what kind of voice it's given." That was a really impactful moment for me. So I think she is one of the most influential leaders in the field, for a variety of reasons. And that moment was one of them. (Interview, 11/9/2020)

As Chris reflected specifically on the women's chamber ensemble, he argued that when musicians think of choirs at Michigan State University, they often think of Dr. Snow's Women's Chamber Ensemble first. Authors such as Gauthier (2005) and O'Toole (1998) argued that women's choirs are often seen as the least prestigious of all choral ensembles. Chris's reflection on the women's choir at Michigan State University may be evidence of a slow but meaningful shift in the way that women's and treble ensembles are perceived in the world of choral music.

Professor Miller: "A Father Figure to All of Us."

For the students of Dawson State University's men's choir, the community of the men's choir is certainly about the singers in the ensemble, but the leadership of the men's choir, under the direction of Chris, is key to creating an open and inclusive environment. Jimmy, a gay Vietnamese man and chair of the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion committee for the choir shared his perspective:

Professor Miller is like a father figure to all of us, especially for a lot of us in men's glee club who didn't necessarily have a father figure growing up. We did talk about this yesterday in small group discussion, but he has been a very great father figure and just a supportive constant in our lives. I almost can't explain it. But he is just so absolutely inspiring to us. He knows how to draw that energy and music from us. I can tell you, I've walked into a rehearsal before being just beaten down by life and kicked more and more and more, right? We've all been there, but still, somehow when I enter that auditorium, a mixture of my camaraderie with my brothers and just the inspiration that comes from Professor Miller, I can really feel that energy—*from somewhere*—coming out of me. And I don't even know where that came from, but he almost emits it, just gives it to the rest of us. (Interview, 2/22/2021)

Jimmy emphasized the role that the men's choir has played as he has grown to appreciate, accept, and embrace his identity as a gay Vietnamese man. Jimmy, who had never sung in a choir before coming to Dawson State, was grateful to have someone like Chris as his first choir conductor. "Whenever I have an issue, I email him, I text him with anything I want, and he'll always respond—even with a brand new baby! He's still completely open to take us in and treat us like his children" (Interview, 2/22/2021). Much like a father figure, Chris also makes time to build social relationships with the singers, playing frisbee with them at retreat, stopping to play a game of hacky sack, and sitting with the singers during their dinners.

Chris's dedication to deconstructing society's expectations of masculinity has had a profound impact on the men's choir students. Matthew, the choir's president, elaborated:

He is willing to be vulnerable with people, which was something that I was super unfamiliar with. I was very guarded against vulnerability, and seeing Professor Miller being so vulnerable to the choir and talking about his personal experiences, giving us time as students to talk with one another and to be vulnerable with one another. Like in rehearsal time saying, "Okay we're going to take five minutes here. Turn to the person next to you and talk about a time you went through this hardship, or maybe like last time you cried," or something like, "Just be vulnerable with other people." And that was something that was really foreign to me and was really transformative for me as a person. (Interview, 2/18/2021)

The men's choir students respect his artistry, but he is more than a conductor to the singers of the DSU men's choir. Matthew went on:

I actually think of him as a great person first before I think of him as a great director—he is an amazing director, but he is so willing to be himself when directing us. I mean, he

obviously sometimes is putting on the “I’m a teacher” hat, but a lot of times, he's just wearing the “I’m a person hat,” you know? And very much trying to be himself when directing the choir. (Interview, 2/18/2021)

As a first-year teacher, I remember a well-meaning colleague telling me to not smile before Christmas as a means of establishing authority with students. As time went on, I realized that the more I shared of myself as an individual, where I let my out-of-school personality bleed into my work as a teacher, the more I could build meaningful relationships with students. I have always valued honesty and vulnerability in teachers and mentors. It’s clear that honesty and vulnerability are among the characteristics that the singers value most in him as a leader, musician, and person. (Memo, 2/18/2021)

Summary

In this chapter, I looked at Chris’s history as a chorister and the musical experiences that brought him to directing choirs. I also have detailed how his relationship with men’s choirs, tenor-bass choirs, and tenor and bass singers have shaped his work as a choral conductor. Chris had some critical mentors in his career that both brought him to choral music and choral conducting and influenced how he strives to have a choir that is inclusive to singers of a variety of identities. For Chris, social justice is a critical element of his pedagogy that is reflected in the literature he selects and the relationships he has with the students and community. I will explore the way that social justice presents itself in his choral ensembles more in the next chapter. In Chapter 7, I will focus on Chris’s work with the current men’s choir and how the conversation surrounding men’s choirs has evolved over Chris’s career.

CHAPTER 7: PROFESSOR MILLER AND DAWSON STATE UNIVERSITY’S MEN’S CHOIR

Dawson State University’s Men’s Choir

In this chapter, I talk about the structure of the Dawson State University’s Men’s Choir as both a class and a student organization. Each of the three tenets of the organization—history, community, and artistry—contribute to the unique and complicated nature of the group as it relates to membership, recruitment, alumni, and the university’s women’s choir. I will detail the diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts of the ensemble and the ways that gender presents itself in the choir through mechanisms such as literature selection, uniform, admission policies, and sexuality. Finally, I will discuss the next steps the ensemble is taking, including a potential name change, to create an environment centered on gender inclusion, and contextualize the experience of the men’s choir within the national conversation about gender in choral ensembles.

Both a Class and a Student Organization

One of the unique aspects of the men’s choir at Dawson State University is that it functions both as a course in which students can sign up for college credit, and as a student organization within the university. Matthew, the president of the student organization and a singer in the choir, talked about the balance of the two:

Professor Miller is the director of the choir, so he handles the class side of things, and I’m the president of the choir, so I handle the student org side of things. Say there’s an issue happening or something. We’re often debating, “Okay, this seems like a student org issue, not a class issue,” and so we’ll kind of go and handle it that way. The social side of things very much comes from the fact that we are a student org, and not just a class.

(Interview, 2/18/2021)

Although many collegiate choirs have boards that take care of things such as social events, organization details, and tour logistics, the executive board of the men's choir has positions such as publicity manager and alumni relations manager, a diversity and equity chair, and a liaison to the women's choir at their university. Chris likened the organization to one of a nonprofit arts organization in terms of how "robust" (Interview, 12/10/2020) the executive board is. Chris is the musical director of the choir, but the students play a critical role in the organization, structure, and culture of the men's choir.

In talking about the men's choir, Chris often fluctuated between language about being the musical director of the ensemble, and at other times would revert to student opinion, experience, and expertise. As the conductor of the choir, Chris views the music to be the central tenet of the ensemble. At the end of the day, however, Chris sees the organization as one that belongs to the singers:

In working with the choir, there is a dance, because the men's choir is not my choir. I always remind myself of that. I get to be their music director, it's my greatest privilege, but it's not my choir. I get to shape and influence it in my unique ways in this Chris Miller era, and I'm grateful for that platform and that opportunity, but it's theirs. It's the students. It is a student organization. That identity piece is really key. I can inspire and influence as much as I can from my perch, but at the end of the day, it's theirs, and they have to want it. (Interview, 12/10/2020)

The "dance" that Chris refers to includes issues of policy within the men's choir: "We all have roles to play. I think part of it, as the music director, is having the right ideas of where it's right to have a light touch and where it's right to assert" (Interview, 12/10/2020). Later in this chapter, I

will discuss how that dynamic plays out within the men’s choir, especially as it relates to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

The Tenets

Chris detailed the three central tenets of the men’s choir that have long been established as part of the formal philosophy of the ensemble—history, community, and artistry. Chris’s dedication to the three tenets was reflected in the conversations I had with the men’s choir students. Daniel was a member of the men’s choir before Chris became its conductor, which gave him a deeper perspective about the long-term implementation of the three tenets. “I think that the reason why Professor Miller is so good at what he does and conducting us is that he focuses really holistically on all three of those points” (Interview, 2/18/2021).

Chris compared the three tenets to that of the legs of a stool. Without one of the legs, the structure of the stool would collapse:

Musical excellence is undeniably a priority of mine, but I bought in, from day one, on the critical nature of all three tenets. That they all feed each other, in a symbiotic sense where you get to strive for artistry because the community is so powerful and that the building of relationships is so meaningful. (Interview, 12/10/2020)

Music is at the heart of choral organizations, but it is obvious that the history and community of the ensemble are equally important to Chris and the singers. Below, I explain how the students and their teacher-conductor see the tenets playing out in the choir and student organization.

Artistry

For Chris, each of the tenets of the ensemble—history, community, and artistry—have an important role to play in the way the choir functions as a course and a student organization. “My priority is on the artistry side of the fence” (Interview, 12/10/2020), Chris shared. Although his

musical expectations for the students are high, the students also expect a lot of themselves. “That rigor expectation is hardwired into the organization and to all of its members” (Interview, 12/10/2020). The rigor of the artistry is an example of how each of the tenets feed one another. All concerts are performed from memory, which has been the case since the inception of the DSU men’s choir. The artistic rigor of the men’s choir is also reflected in their invited performances at the state, regional, and national levels.

Because the men’s choir functions both as a university course as well as a student organization, it is important to Chris that the students remember that music is the central element of the group, and that the history and community come as a result of the artistry they produce as an ensemble:

My caveat to the three tenets is that we're not a social organization. We're not a fraternity, right? We are a choir, and that is our absolute distinctive. And so, in light of that, this is where artistry, from my perspective, gets elevated, just a hair. If we are not committed to and producing at a level that is truly our very best and our most excellent artistic offering, then we undermine the core of what we exist to do, and then we become just a social ensemble or social community that happens to sing. And that is something that I believe the students who are in the men’s choir understand, that they recognize. That part of what makes history and community so important, so valuable to us, is that we will not compromise musical excellence, and that is just a guiding light. That is a huge motivator for how we do our work and why we are able to have such a meaningful, long-standing tradition and community investment is because we work so hard together. And it just kind of cycles around itself. (Interview, 12/10/2020)

As Chris and the men’s choir students discussed the three tenets—history, community, and artistry—they continued to reference them as they considered issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion. At times, the tenets supported their inclusion efforts, and at times, they felt the weight of the organization’s history and the wide-spread alumni community as they considered potential changes in the organization. I will discuss the interplay of the tenets with the ensemble’s DEI efforts later this chapter.

History

The men’s choir is the oldest student organization on the DSU campus. The history of the ensemble is one that the students and conductor approach with a great sense of pride. Chris shared his perspective:

Being a part of an organization with a history is something that I think is an incredible honor, and it's something that you can learn from, grow from, and celebrate from while also looking to the future and looking to who you're becoming for today and for tomorrow. And so the tradition of the men’s choir, the traditions within the men’s choir, are part of what contextualizes the way in which we build community and share music. You feel like you're a part of something so much bigger than yourself. (Interview, 12/10/2020)

As with many older institutions, the men’s choir history is one that has both a strong musical past and a history with which the students and conductor must reckon. Jimmy—a gay, Vietnamese business major and the diversity, equity, and inclusion chair for the men’s choir—voiced that of all the tenets, the traditions that come with the history tenet “are the ones that I’m currently struggling with a bit” (Interview, 2/22/2021). Jimmy reflected on the fact that the organization did not racially integrate until after the Civil Rights movement and that the

organization has ties to blackface minstrelsy in the past. “That's not something that we can ever correct, but we can take steps in order to make sure something like that never happens again” (Interview, 2/22/2021). Both the singers and the conductor make concerted efforts to not hide these issues, but to bring them out to the open and find ways to discuss them through literature selection, which I will discuss later this chapter.

As the choir considers issues of diversity and inclusion, the singers and conductor seek to find a balance between honoring the history of the ensemble while thinking toward the future. In talking with Daniel, he said in a “more courageous lifetime” (Email, 2/17/2021), he would have majored in women’s, sexuality, and gender studies because of the importance he places on issues related to gender and sexuality. Because of the importance that Daniel places on social justice issues, he values the environment Chris has fostered:

I think, as a student organization, we largely do a good job of respecting where we've been in the past, the legacy we're standing on, while still moving us forward. And changing where we need to change, adjusting where we need to adjust, sort of becoming the best version of the men’s choir that we can be today. (Interview, 2/18/2021)

The pull of the past, present, and future are the heart of the struggle for conductors and singers as they consider inclusion in traditionally single-gender ensembles. The DSU men’s choir is a key example of the responsibility students feel to their choir’s past and the desire to create more equitable ensembles for singers in the future.

Community

The third tenet of the DSU men’s choir is community. Matthew, the president of the student organization, provided his perspective as a student and member of the executive board for the choir:

We take community to heart. We own that. We love the community that comes from making music together. I don't exactly know where it comes from. It's just every single person I've seen in the choir is just so willing to give their all to this choir, both musically putting so much emotion into the music, and engaging in that way, but also outside of choir, just being there for the other members of the choir. (Interview, 2/18/2021)

For the students in the choir, “just being there for the other members” manifests in a variety of forms. The students spoke to the value of the friendships and relationships that come out of the choir. Because the majority of the students in the choir are not music majors, many find mutual community between their major fields of study—such as engineering and business—and from there find additional support systems that are fostered out of singing.

Given the dual nature of the choir as both a class and a student organization, there is much flexibility for building community both within and outside of rehearsal time. Some of the choir social events center around music, such as tours, concerts, and singing at university tailgates. Others are more focused on non-musical community making, such as intramural sports. Many of the events that look social on the surface continue to be influenced by the musical nature of the ensemble. One example of such a social event are the weekly post-class dinners. “We literally sing songs between bites, and we just enjoy this music-making together” (Interview, 2/18/2021), Matthew shared. A number of scholars have noted the importance of not only acknowledging, but embracing the social aspects of men's choirs. Some teacher-conductors specifically create men's choirs in their choir programs to increase male enrollment (Dame, 2011) and address classroom management issues related to student behavior (Carp, 2004; Dame, 2019; Williams, 2012). Both students and teachers benefit from these ensembles, with students

reporting a sense of teamwork, inclusion, and acceptance in a society that may deem singing to go against gender roles often associated with men and masculinity (Ramsey, 2013; Sweet, 2010).

For Daniel, the community of the ensemble centers on the work that Chris does as a professor and a conductor:

I think that he, maybe more than any choral conductor educator that I've worked with, *really*, deeply cares about us, and he really cares about our wellbeing, not only as musicians and students, but also as people. (Interview, 2/18/2021)

Daniel's perspective about Chris as a teacher-conductor reflects the attitudes and respect that Chris had for his middle school choir teacher. Although music is at the heart of the men's choir, teacher-conductors play a vital role in the community of an ensemble (Bannerman, 2016; Freer, 2006, 2009; Gackle, 2011; Palkki, 2016; Parker, 2018; Watson et al., 2019). Chris' deep care for the students is perhaps one of the greatest strengths and draws of the ensemble.

Membership and Recruitment

The DSU men's choir is made up of a variety of singers from across the campus, but the vast majority of them are non-music majors. For the university's choirs that are primarily made up of music majors, singers are often recruited by advisors or voice teachers as part of the degree requirement. Because the majority of the singers in the men's choir are non-majors, the executive board has taken time to consider other recruitment methods. Matthew, the current men's choir president, used to focus on recruitment efforts when he acted as the publicity manager for the ensemble. He said that although the ways students come to the ensemble is varied, "I always used to say that the best recruiting mechanism we have is word of mouth, and *specifically*, a current member or like a former member going to someone and saying, 'You gotta audition'" (Interview, 2/18/2021). That is exactly how Matthew came to join the ensemble—a family friend

who had sung in the men's choir recruited him to sing. "I feel like those personal connections are really what bring people in more than a poster on a wall" (Interview, 2/18/2021). Chris's initial recruitment into choir as a middle schooler follows a similar path. Although a current singer did not draw him to choir, the prospect of singing with friends is a powerful force for singers (Sweet 2010).

Daniel knew he wanted to join the men's choir after his high school choir teacher—a DSU alum—gave him tickets to watch the DSU men's choir perform. Jimmy did musical theater in high school, but he had never sung in a choir before coming to Dawson State. After finding an Instagram video of the DSU men's choir singing his favorite musical theater piece, he drove two hours with a friend to watch them sing at the university. He was already considering attending DSU for college, but after watching the men's choir perform, he was sold on the school. "Beforehand, I did not know what school I wanted to go to, but honestly choir was the thing that drew me towards that school" (Interview, 2/18/2021).

Men's Spaces

The Challenge. Across the country, teacher-conductors and singers have considered the complex nature of gender and gender inclusion as they relate to women's, men's, treble, and tenor-bass ensembles. Daniel voiced the duality of men's spaces being complicated in regards to inclusion while also being a powerful way for men to unpack toxic masculine ideals:

I think that there is some value in having the space be a space kind of for men, I guess. It's complicated and it's thorny, but an all-men's ensemble gives especially people who are coming from a place where they're not super secure in who they are—you know, gay singers who aren't out yet, singers who identify as maybe genderqueer but male presenting—it gives them a safe, productive space to sort of understand what their

masculinity means in the context of male-identifying people who are supportive of that journey. (Interview, 2/18/2021)

In a study of a college fraternity, Hesp and Brookes (2009) interviewed gay college students about the intersection of gender and sexuality in a fraternity, with participants placing emphasis on the value of “brotherhood” in their lives as openly gay men. Although scholars such as McCormack and Anderson (2014) point to a decline in homophobia in recent years,⁶ Levesque (2016) argued that labeling LGBTQ identities as ones “no longer constructed as deviant overlook[s] the lived experiences of youths who continue to navigate unsafe school climates and local communities in which they live” (p. 644). Representation in curriculum and active allyship, as well as creating and enforcing non-discrimination policies, continue to be of the utmost importance for LGBTQ students to feel safe, welcome, and accepted in schools and student organizations (Hesp & Brooks, 2009; Goldberg et al., 2019). For the men’s choir, the choir has a DEI Chair and Assistant chair that oversee a committee on DEI issues; “help the singers in exploring the historical significances and social nuances of the repertoire;” and hold the conductor, singers, and executive board accountable to the DEI values of the choir, “including, but not limited to: auditions, outreach events, collaborations, musicianship, and everyday student organization life” (Artifact, 4/20/2021).

In Ramsey’s (2013) dissertation, the choir teacher-conductor sought to create a space with more progressive views about gender and sexuality and saw men’s choirs as a means for breaking down negative stereotypes and gender roles associated with masculinity in the arts. Daniel took those ideals one step further and moved them from beyond himself as an individual and his role as an ally to minoritized populations:

⁶ Levesque (2016) defines homophobia as “an intense fear of homosexuality and LGBTQ cultures in the 1980s” (p. 646).

I think that for a lot of men for men in the 21st century, this idea of, what masculinity is, what positive masculinity is, how do we work within this construct of masculinity to construct a positive life for ourselves, and to empower women, to empower gay people, to empower LGBTQ people, to empower gender nonbinary people—people like me right? Like, I’m a straight white guy. I’m tall. I’m six foot three. I’m well spoken. I’m outspoken. All of these things are parts of my identity. Having a space where I can understand how my masculinity works in the context of other men, in the context of an all-male ensemble helps me understand how my gender works in mixed-gender situations. (Interview, 2/18/2021)

Because college men can “rely on hypermasculine performance to assert themselves as men and affirm their statuses with male peers” (Harris, 2008, p. 468), Chris and the students often use choir as a means for confronting “toxic masculinity”—a term that describes “homophobic and misogynistic speech and violence by men” (Harrington, 2021, p. 349). For heterosexual students like Daniel, having a designated space to both challenge the harms of masculinity and learn how to use his privilege to advocate for others can be an essential part of identity building. For LGBTQIA+ members of the choir, Chris’s use of repertoire to foster difficult conversations about gender and inclusion can be one of the many tools that conductors and students can use to act as allies and make inclusive spaces for members of the LGBTQIA+ community.

The Value. Matthew, an engineering major and president of the men’s choir, spoke to the value of singing in a men’s choir. His high school’s intro-to-choir class was split into a men’s and women’s choir: “And I think the purpose of that, more than anything, was to try to get men to join. It’s always hard in high school to get like men to be involved in the choir programs”

(Interview, 2/18/2021). After his family friend convinced him to at least attend the first men's choir rehearsal at Dawson State University, he was sold from day one:

There's not always a ton of men who sing in choirs in high school, and even though my high school had a male vocal acapella group, even then, it was not many men in the choir program, and so to all of a sudden come into this choir of 100 men—and not just like 100 men, but 100 men who cared and were very good at singing—it blew me away. And so that first rehearsal, at six o'clock is when it started, and it was like—boom! with this chord—boom! with this chord—that instant first chord, I was just blown away. Like, these people care, and they're good, and that was just really a foreign concept to me. So that was really, really inspiring. (Interview, 2/18/2021)

For Matthew, Jimmy, and Daniel, the quality of the music-making was what initially drew them to the men's choir at Dawson State University. Matthew and Daniel specifically reflected on how impactful it was to see a large group of tenors and basses taking singing seriously and defying some of the gender roles they felt were imposed on them in their childhood in regard to singing. “I was teased somewhat relentlessly for being a part of choirs and theater” (Interview, 2/18/2021), Daniel recalled. A number of scholars have focused on male singers and the social pressure to not engage in singing in a desire to conform to heteronormative ideals (Ashley, 2010, Hall, 2005; Harrison, 2007; Koza, 1993-1994; McBride & Palkki, 2020, Palkki, 2005; Sweet, 2010). Ashley (2010) specifically suggested men's choirs as a way to specifically address the social pressures students experience related to gender and music.

In Daniel's high school program, male singers were often fast-tracked to the top mixed ensemble in his high school's choir program, which created some animosity within his school's

choir program. His most positive and impactful musical experiences have been in choirs made up of tenors and basses. The reasons for this were both musical and social:

I have found, in my own personal life, that finding communities of men, where we can all make music together, has been a really *powerful* and *positive* experience for me, as far as understanding masculinity and how masculinity is important in identity construction, and *especially* for young men. (Interview, 2/18/2021)

Earlier in the year, Taylor—a trans singer who is currently in the ensemble—emailed Chris specifically saying that he was grateful that the men’s choir was a place where he was accepted for who he was. For Chris, that level of acceptance is the ultimate goal: “That is what men’s choir should be—is that we create a space for you to be who you are—period” (Interview, 12/10/2021).

And what I love is I know Taylor feels embraced and accepted for who he is in this choir without having to say who he is. And I know that because I watched how he's engaged, and he's already going to be a leader. He just got appointed to a leadership role for the choir next year. It's exciting. They'll love it. (4/4/2021)

For some trans and gender-expansive singers, being accepted into a gendered ensemble, such as a women’s or men’s choir, could be a key part of their journey to being recognized and accepted for their gender identity. For singers who have not disclosed their gender identity, however, gendered choral ensembles could present a number of challenges for them as they learn to navigate music as a trans or gender-expansive singer.

Alumni

Because the men’s choir at DSU has such a long history, they have a large community of alumni around the world. “I just adore our alumni” (Interview, 3/4/2021) Chris beamed. For

many of the alumni, the men's choir was the most seminal aspect of their college experience and continues to influence them to this day:

It is just a huge part of what it is to be a member of the men's choir, is that you don't shake that identity after you graduate. In fact, it just deepens and grows. And you come back to concerts. You come back to the performance hall in the fall, you come back in the spring, it's your reunion time, if you're hosting a tour concert when they come to your city. It's all of those things. And doing lifelong singing, as so many of these guys do. (Interview, 3/4/2021).

The way the men's choir continues to influence the lives of its former members reflects the central nature of the three tenets—history, community, and artistry—to the spirit of the organization as a whole.

The alumni continue to contribute to the organization in significant ways, such as providing housing during choir tours and through membership dues to the choir's alumni association. As I heard Chris and the men's choir singers talk about the choir's alumni association, I was curious if the alumni tried to influence the music, structure, and organization of the ensemble from the outside, especially as it related to inclusion efforts from within the ensemble. As the president of the student organization, Matthew has heard other student organizations complain about their alumni. To the contrary, Matthew is grateful for the influence of the choir's alumni:

Our alumni are so understanding, like, "Well, this is your organization. Do with it what you want to do." They always have their opinions (laughs). *They always have opinions.* But they are usually pretty understanding of, "This is what you guys think you want to do or best for you guys. Go for it." I definitely do think we have that alumni presence that's

very powerful in our organization, but I don't think it's a negative thing. I think sometimes alumni presence, among students, we do see that as a negative thing in some contexts—like, “All these old alumni here, trying to tell us what we can and cannot do,” you know? But I think ours is a pretty positive one generally. (Interview, 2/18/2021)

Chris echoed Matthew’s sentiments about the level of influence the alumni have on the organization. “The alumni have big opinions,” Chris echoed, “but in general, it’s not a meddling kind of engagement. It’s more about, ‘How can I support? We understand that things change’” (Interview, 3/4/2021). As an example, the men’s choir traditionally sang songs about drinking and songs with “various misogynistic perspectives” (3/4/2021), but as the choir has evolved over the years, Chris no longer programs those songs. Because of the long tenure of the ensemble at the university, a number of traditions have been developed within the choir over the years. As Chris examined some of the repertoire that was previously standard in the choir, he sought to find balance by maintaining some traditions—such as musical excellence and tours—while creating new traditions, including programming new repertoire and abandoning old staples. Although some alumni have expressed remorse at the loss of those songs, Chris held his ground and made sure they knew “that’s just not what we do” (Interview, 3/4/2021). The relationship with the alumni is an example of the complex role that history has to play within the men’s choir, especially as they consider changes for the future.

DSU Women’s Choir

At DSU, there is also a women’s choir. It, too, is structured both as a course and a student organization. Although it was founded after the men’s choir, it is among the oldest organizations at the university. As is typical with men’s and women’s choirs, the choirs have traditionally done literature according to voice type—high voice music for the women’s choir and low-voice music

for the men's choir. Beyond the occasional collaboration at commencement, university concerts requiring mass choirs, and the annual treble and tenor-bass choir festivals, the groups have performed their music separately, including holding their own performances. Chris believes that students are specifically joining these choirs because of the voicing of each choir: He also has a sense that since the singers are drawn to high- or low-voice repertoire, they may not be interested in collaborating musically. "That's part of why they love singing in those choirs, is singing that particular rep" (Interview, 3/4/2021). Each of the three students I interviewed reiterated this sentiment, saying they were drawn both to the community of the men's choir and the repertoire they sang.

When I asked Chris about the relationship between the men's and women's choirs at his university, he quipped, "Well, do you have 12 hours? Let's crack open a bottle of wine. We'll get through the nuances of that conversation" (Interview, 3/4/2021). He went on to describe the relationship between the two ensembles as "complex" and "layered" (Interview, 3/4/2021). A variety of factors play into the relationship, including the history of the organizations as separate organizations, differences in leadership styles and organizational goals between conductors and student leadership, and time for collaboration. "There's just a ton of influences that make for the relationship to be very complicated, because it's so deep-seated, relating to alumni, years and years of this kind of dynamic" (Interview, 3/4/2021). Chris believes gender is a contributing factor to the nature of the relationship between the men's and women's choirs:

Over the years, the men's choir has been accused of being highly holding a superiority complex, and with that kind of the trappings of misogyny, and a lot of the ugly side of gender orientation, when your identity is oriented around gender, that can be really unfortunate. And I think the men's choir has fallen into many of those traps over the

years. And it's almost been this competition thing. When the men's choir sings a concert, 3000 people show up, and the women's choir sings a concert at the same auditorium, 250 people show up. So all the metrics by which people would measure things, there are very, very different balances. (Interview, 3/4/2021)

As an undergraduate student, I sang in my university's women's choir. My university also had a men's choir with whom we had a close relationship—joint concerts, retreats, tours, barbecues, rehearsal times, etc. Despite the close and collegial relationship between the ensembles, there always continued to be a disparity between the groups. When singers went on to be accepted into the university's top mixed ensemble, women ceased to sing in the treble ensemble, while men continued to sing in the men's choir if their schedule allowed. Audience members would applaud for the women's choir yet would respond with even more vigor for the men's choir. The director of the women's choir made consistent efforts to make the women's choir experience meaningful, and yet I always felt like my experience in the women's choir was inferior to that of the singer's in the men's choir—even though the ensemble experiences closely mirrored one another.

(Memo, 3/4/2021)

Teacher-conductors may find that they need to work harder with female singers to “win them over” (Snow, 2012, p. 107), perhaps due to perceptions of prestige and ensemble hierarchy. Scholars like Gauthier (2005) and O'Toole (1998) agreed that women's choirs are often viewed as less prestigious than men's choirs. Although some may view men's and mixed ensembles as more desirable because of their “fuller sound” (Gauthier, 2005, p. 44), Sieck (2017) reminded music educators that no particular ensemble make-up is inherently superior, but rather that audiences and performers alike have been conditioned to believe that certain ensemble types, such as mixed and men's choirs, are superior to others.

At DSU, the organizations themselves also vary in terms of alumni involvement. The men's choir has a large alumni organization in which the members pay annual dues, making the financial backing of the organizations—and thus the way the organizations function—“grossly imbalanced” (Interview, 3/4/2021). For Chris, when it comes to the finances of the organizations, “you have to acknowledge that as a first and significant differentiator. And so as it comes to the relationship between the ensembles, that disparity is an influence” (Interview, 3/4/2021).

In recent years, there have been concerted efforts made to bring in a new era of social collaboration between the ensembles. Like Chris, Matthew saw the separation between the ensembles not as something centered explicitly on animosity, but rather “just a lack of connection” (Interview, 2/18/2021). Matthew remembered the president of the women's choir—“a really strong presence” in the choirs—being the one to “[extend] that olive branch kind of connection” (Interview, 2/18/2021) to him and the men's choir to facilitate more social connections.

Like many organizations, that social connection has been difficult to build during a pandemic. As diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) chair, Jimmy noted that historically, the women's choir ushered for the men's choir concerts, but the men's choir did not return the favor:

Even in the 90s, we just felt like, “We're the older organization. We deserve more privileges than you do. We just don't have time to help you out, but we think that you should help us out.” And there was always that dynamic of, “Oh my gosh, the women's choir is younger than us.” I think that's the excuse we hid behind: “You're the younger organization, so therefore you're not as prestigious and you shouldn't get as much support from us.” A lot of that has changed. We do have a stronger bond with the women's choir now. (Interview, 2/18/2021)

The two choirs now have positions on their executive boards specifically meant to act as liaisons to the other ensemble. For example, the women's choir liaison is on the men's choir board and attends all of the executive board meetings of the women's choir to bolster communication between the groups, and vice versa. Jimmy, the inclusion chair, sees the position as a means to "make a strong bond with the women's choir and try to diversify our mindsets in terms of gender" (Interview, 2/18/2021). Chris is not involved in the social aspect of the organization, so the addition of the liaison positions was initiated by the students. The mutual intentionality between the two organizations speaks to the evolving nature of the relationship between the women's and men's choirs at DSU.

Inclusion in the DSU Men's Choir

Before Chris became the conductor of the men's choir at DSU, the choir had strived to sing "with a cause in mind, with especially a focus on aspects of social justice" and to "learn about some of these critical issues of our time" (Interview, 12/20/2020). The choir's DEI efforts are reflected in the repertoire they sing, with topics ranging from topics about racism in the United States to the stigma surrounding mental health, particularly for men. DEI efforts have become a central focus for the ensemble, its conductor, and the members, and goes beyond the music-making itself. For example, the men's choir added a new position to their executive board to address social justice efforts. Jimmy explained:

The inclusion chair position was created last year when we came to the realization that the men's choir does have a large history of xenophobia, racism, sexism. Beforehand, it was kind of like a voluntary position where I was like, "Okay, we need to do some stuff, so I'm just going to you create some initiatives. I'm going to bring in some guest speakers

and stuff.” It wasn't until recently when we had it become an actual formal leadership position. (Interview, 2/22/2021)

Traditionally, the men's choir used “very non-academic language”—such as boy-o's and guys—had a “super bro-y” feel, and was predominantly made up of “very cisgender, white male heterosexual” (Interview, 12/10/2020) singers. Although Chris finds the organization to be “one of the most embracing communities in spite of the enormous history it carries,” (Interview, 11/9/2020), he knows inclusion has not always been a central goal of the ensemble:

Even as recent as the early 2000s, the men's choir was not even very friendly to gay students, let alone transgender students. I don't think you would have found a transgender student in that space. It was kind of a rich, white kid, masculinity club, in a lot of ways. I say that acknowledging that that's a pretty harsh label to put on any institution that's as old as ours. But it carried that. And it's grown a lot. And I credit my predecessors for creating a culture that became a hospitable place, that became an embracing place, that became inclusive, and I've been able to continue that work and extend that as a major priority of my own leadership. (Interview, 11/9/2020)

Chris and his most recent predecessor made concerted efforts to create an environment centered on inclusion. The fact that the choir exists both as a course and a student organization adds another layer of complexity to the organization's DEI efforts. Chris believes that the times things go “off the rails and students are not welcome for who they are and celebrated for who they are” are the times in which the choir students meet “outside of official men's choir activity” (Interview, 12/10/2020). This is another example of the fine line that Chris walks as the conductor of an ensemble that is also a club:

This is where there are aspects of the men's choir that I don't know about and I probably never will, nor should I, right? I mean, I'm a *professor*, and there's a social life within the choir that is students. And as long as they abide by university policies and whatnot, that's the key—and they do. I know that. (Interview, 12/10/2020)

Chris's philosophy about men's choir's centers on "creating empathy," "breaking down... masculinity norms that society hands us," and "softening the underbelly of your typical college male" (Interview #1). His approach to men's spaces works in contrast to a history of men's spaces engaging in hazing tactics, which is particularly pervasive at the collegiate level. In a survey of college students, 61% of male survey respondents indicated that they had experienced at least one act of hazing through a team or student organization with 56% of overall participants reporting that they had experienced at least one hazing behavior in a performing arts organization (Allan & Madden, 2012). Examples of hazing most typically experienced by men include drinking-related hazing, verbal abuse, acting as a servant for organization members, and social exclusion (Allan et al., 2019). Although some studies have reported that students found hazing to be an integral part of organizations' functions, resulting in positive outcomes (Allan & Madden, 2012; Kimbrough, 2007), the marching band students in Silveira & Hudson's (2015) study believed hazing had "detrimental and harmful" (p. 20) outcomes. Silveira & Hudson stressed that conductors have a vital role to play in educating students about hazing as well as instituting hazing prevention measures within their ensembles. Their recommendations included specifically defining examples of behaviors that constitute hazing and broadening hazing awareness efforts on college campuses. Chris and the students did not report a history of hazing in the ensemble, but they were aware of historic elements of the ensemble related to sexism, racism, homophobia, and xenophobia, which can result in hazing and harassment.

Gender

As Chris reflected on the presence of gender in music, he was keenly aware of the strong presence that gender has within music education: “I mean, really, my gosh. It’s remarkable and complex how we’ve created these associations” (Interview, 4/4/2021). The influence of gender in a men’s choir is especially palpable. In this section, I will discuss some of the ways that gender presents itself in the DSU men’s choir, such as literature selection, uniform, voice parts, and the gender of the conductor. I will also discuss some of the specific thoughts and considerations Chris and the students have about trans and gender-expansive students as they consider gender inclusivity in a men’s choir.

Trans and Gender-Expansive Singers

Policies and Discourse. As conductors across the country have considered the structures of traditionally single-gender ensembles, one of the greatest points of consideration has been creating inclusive spaces for trans and gender-expansive singers. When I asked Daniel about inclusion and exclusion in a men’s choir, he immediately focused on the membership policies for singing in the ensemble. The student organization’s constitution states that all male students at the university are eligible to enroll in the ensemble. When I asked him about the nuance of gender exclusion in gendered spaces, he referred to the question as “interesting and very complicated” and one that “does give me pause” (Interview, 2/18/2021): “We are, in a lot of ways, acting in an exclusive manner by saying any student identifying as male. I don’t have any easy answers” (Interview, 2/18/2021). Gendered organizations such as universities (Caplan-Bricker, 2019) and sports leagues (Buzuvis, 2017) have also wrestled with membership policies that are often defined by gender segregation. Some groups have chosen to expand the definitions

of gender (Buzuvis, 2017), while others have chosen to move away from gendered definitions altogether (Feibel & Cui, 2018).

When I asked Chris about potential barriers of entry for trans and gender-expansive students, he, too, focused on the language of the ensemble. “In our bylaws, there’s language that says ‘male-identifying,’ so I think even that could ultimately be updated, in time. But even that language was a big qualifier that was added in recent years” (Interview, 12/10/2020). Students highlighted the inclusive language that Chris used in rehearsal, referring to sections by voice type rather than gender, but that the trans-inclusive nature of the ensemble may not translate to those who are not in the ensemble: “That’s just not something that we have marketed, for lack of a better word. That’s not something that we’ve made clear to our auditionee pool” (Interview, 2/22/2021). Jimmy’s perspective highlights the importance of being explicit and intentional with inclusion efforts and ensuring that those efforts translate to the marketing for the ensemble.

Jimmy emphasized that trans singers would be welcome in the ensemble: “Since I’m in it, I’m like, ‘100%! Yes! Audition Join us! Please! The more perspectives, the merrier” (Interview, 2/22/2021). He reflected on how a men’s choir may look from the perspective of a trans or gender-expansive singer who is not currently in the ensemble:

I think looking in on it, [if I were trans], I would be a little scared. You know, just 100 guys who were comfortable with their own gender identity, as far as I know. I think that is intimidating looking in. And plus, when we say history, there’s a lot of implicit ideas that come with that long history. I think that’s something that we’re going to have to make a little more transparent and we’re going to have to be a little more transparent in our marketing, for lack of a better word, and just the way that we relate this to our community. (Interview, 2/22/2021)

Jimmy's perspective highlights the importance of both internal and external work in which organizations must engage to ensure that it is an inclusive ensemble. Even if a choir may be inclusive internally, the external image of the ensemble is vital to diversifying the ensemble's make-up.

Disclosure. In initial interviews, each of the singers explicitly stated that there had never been trans or gender-expansive singers within the men's choir. I highlighted this particular perception to Chris, knowing that he had brought up a trans singer, Taylor, currently enrolled in the men's choir. In Taylor's choir audition, Chris described Taylor's ability to sing "beautiful, soaring soprano notes" (Interview, 4/4/2021), which led to Chris and Taylor having explicit discussions about how to make Taylor feel most comfortable vocally within the ensemble. As I relayed the choir students' perceptions that there had never been a trans or gender-expansive singer in the ensemble, Chris reflected on the pedagogical implications of singers disclosing their gender identity to some individuals while not explicitly addressing it with others:

Chris: That just reminds me that there was no way—unless Taylor disclosed it—no one's gonna know that Taylor can sing a high A or B. That's not gonna come out unless Taylor decides to let it be known. It's just a reminder for me to check in with Taylor. Like, "Hey, how are you doing? How are we doing? How can we support you better?" So I'm just really grateful to know that. (Interview, 4/4/2021)

Chris's experiences working with trans singers highlights the value of continued and open communication with trans and gender-expansive singers as conductors continually develop environments that are inclusive to a variety of gender identities.

Literature Selection

Much of the stereotypical repertoire of men's choirs center on sailing, drinking songs, and songs about female conquests. Prior to Chris's arrival at DSU, there was already a move to shift away from music with "various misogynistic perspectives" (Interview, 3/4/2021). The way Chris programs repertoire, particularly in relation to gender, is in a way creating a new tradition of music-making in the ensemble that focuses on gender inclusivity:

There's so many songs that are just off the table for me anymore. They just are. Because it's just such a heteronormative-heavy perspective that I just don't think is what we want to be promoting in the men's choir anymore. There's a piece that the men's choir used to perform that is just not appropriate at all—it was super, extremely popular in the 60s—and gosh, alumni singers clamor: "Can you program this again?!" And I'm just like, "*No!*" (laughs) Never. I will not. It's just not gonna happen." (Interview, 3/4/2021)

This is another example of the complex relationship between history, community, and artistry, and how they each influence the philosophy of the ensemble.

As a conference presenter, I have had teachers ask me if they can change the lyrics of a song to be more inclusive. Chris did wonder if there was an "ethic behind changing a pronoun" (Interview, 3/4/2021) or other lyrics of the piece to make it more inclusive. As an example, Chris pointed to Bobby McFerrin's setting of Psalm 23. The biblical text is directed at God, but McFerrin's version changes the pronoun from "He" to "she" in dedication of his mother:

The Lord is my Shepherd, I have all I need

She makes me lie down in green meadows

Beside the still waters, She will lead

She restores my soul, She rights my wrongs

She leads me in a path of good things

And fills my heart with songs....

As a listener, Chris referred to the experience of listening to that piece as “so beautiful, and so powerful and impactful” (Interview, 3/4/2021). Although he did not take an explicit stance on whether conductors should or should not change the lyrics of a piece, he said that they are “really important choices, as directors of ensembles, that we need to thoughtfully make” (Interview, 3/4/2021). Conductors can consider elements of the text such as pronouns and other gendered language—such as “brotherhood” and “mankind”—and determine how they will discuss or alter the language to best fit the needs of the ensemble.

Mental Health. Both Chris and the students highlighted the role that literature plays in deconstructing masculine ideals within the ensemble. The social pressures of traditional masculine norms can contribute to an increased risk of greater physical and mental health struggles, such as substance abuse, heart-related diseases, and depression and anxiety. Despite the increased risks associated with conforming to societal expectations of men, they are less likely to seek out support from mental health professionals (Chatmon, 2020). In a society where men are often not given the space to outwardly express complex emotions, Chris created a program centered on mental health advocacy:

Part of that, again, changed the culture of the men’s choir—thinking about how do we care for each other with great intention? How do we acknowledge that everybody in this room is on a mental health journey in some way, shape, or form, and how do we support each other in that? What are the resources out there that exist within the context of the university, and then broadly beyond, that can help us and be available to us? How can we

let our musical platform be a way to advocate for and highlight some of those resources in our community? (Interview, 12/10/2020)

In addition to music centered on mental health, the choir connected with the campus's mental health services and raised money for a local free clinic for mental health services. In group discussions, Matthew recalled Chris's willingness to be open and vulnerable with the singers about his own struggles:

Previously, I was very guarded against vulnerability, and seeing Professor Miller being so vulnerable to the choir and talking about his personal experiences, giving us time as students to talk with one another and to be vulnerable with one another—like in rehearsal time, saying, “Okay we're going to take five minutes here. Turn to the person next to you and talk about the last time you cried.” And that was something that was really foreign to me and was really transformative for me as a person. (Interview, 2/18/2021)

Chris's example, as well as his dedication to programming repertoire that makes space for difficult conversations, has left a long-lasting impact on the students. Daniel previously took a break from school to focus on his mental health, and Chris took the time to have a “very honest, vulnerable conversation” (Interview, 2/18/2021) with Daniel about his mental health journey. For Daniel, making space for the singers to talk about mental health has made the choir “a stronger, better place because of it” (Interview, 2/18/2021). Jimmy noted the change in both the internal culture of the choir as well as the personal development of the individual singers:

So many of the lessons that I learned from that repertoire, I still keep inside of me to this day. It wouldn't have happened unless Professor Miller took that step to touch on a subject that isn't necessarily preceded in men's choral settings. (Interview, 2/22/2021)

The literature that a choir teacher-conductor selects is a vital element to the experience and mission of a choir. Chris's philosophy about men's choirs and the role they can play in deconstructing toxic masculine ideals is reflected in the literature the choir sings. A choir's repertoire can thus act as a direct reflection of the singers' or conductor's ideals and values.

Uniform

One of the longest-standing traditions of Dawson State University's Men's choir is their uniform: tuxedos with tails, cufflinks, studs, and bowties. "Given our personnel, it works. I haven't heard of students who feel like it is a burden to them or a barrier to them" (Interview, 12/10/2020) The uniforms are an example of something that Chris sees as an element that works for now but could very easily change in the future as part of the ensemble's DEI efforts:

I think it's a throwback to a highly masculine—and not necessarily in a good way—image. It's interesting how it's a part of the tradition piece that is currently still beloved, but I could see that changing, and I would be open to that. (Interview, 12/10/2020)

Some choirs use uniforms such as choir robes and all-black as a way to accommodate singers of a variety of gender identities and expressions.

As I talked to the students about the uniforms, they seemed less eager to let go of the uniform:

One of the biggest distinguishing factors of our organization is our look and the tuxes. The tuxes are iconic, and they're honestly one of our biggest marketing strategies: "Come look at a bunch of guys in some tuxes!", right? It gives it such an air of prestige that our student body doesn't want to leave. Plus, there's just a sense of confidence that you have when you put on that uniform, and there is that camaraderie when we're all getting dressed together and putting our bow ties on, helping one another with our bow ties. It's

become less of just our attire and more as part of our culture and our family process. It's so deeply ingrained within our organization. (Interview, 2/22/2021).

The culture of the uniform is also embraced by the former members of the ensemble. Jimmy anticipated "some major upheaval from our alumni if we decided to get rid of the tuxes. Our alumni feel that our tuxes are a defining factor of our organization" (Interview, 2/22/2021).

Matthew again highlighted the complex nature of inclusion efforts in the men's choir: "I don't think it's *un*-accommodating—I think it could be accommodated for—but it's not inherently accommodating for people who are not male-identifying" (Interview, 2/18/2021).

At the end of the day, Jimmy felt that "when it comes to the tradition of the tuxes, guys don't want to get rid of that" (Interview, 2/22/2021). When I shared with Chris that the students seemed less open than he did to change the uniform, he said that didn't surprise him:

They take *such pride* in their coat and tails. All these things have meaning, but I think the meaning goes both ways. It has meaning of significance historically—"this is how we've always done it, and I get to put my tuxedo on for the first time. Do you remember when you first tied your bow tie on your own?"—you know, all those things. But then it also has the meaning of, "Oh, so I don't really know. My body and that tuxedo don't really match. What do I do about that?" That doesn't feel very inclusive. It is, again, so complex. (Interview, 4/4/2021)

He went on to sympathize both with the students' love of the uniform, as well as those who may see tuxedos as a problematic uniform for a choir. "Yes, I think they look absolutely *stellar* on the stage with their bow ties and tuxedos on. Woo! It's a sharp look. But it just screams cisgender men. Without a doubt" (Interview, 4/4/2021).

Given the immense history behind the men's choir and the strength of its marketing team, Chris is keenly aware of the importance that image and branding play into the external image of the ensemble. For those who are not within the ensemble, seeing a choir of singers in tuxedos could easily project the message that the choir continues to be rooted in cisheteronormativity, which would go against many of the DEI efforts Chris has so carefully crafted in his tenure at DSU. The varied opinions about uniforms for the men's choir highlight the interplay of logistics and sentiment within organizations such as the DSU men's choir. As conductors reflect on gender-inclusivity in their ensembles, they must also take into consideration the social and emotional aspects of change and how change may impact the culture of the ensemble.

Ensemble Classification: Gender or Voice Part?

As conductors have considered trans and gender-expansive singers in traditionally single-gender ensembles, some conductors have moved away from membership policies centered on gender—such as men's and women's choirs—to ones focusing on voice part—such as sopranos and altos in treble choirs and tenors and basses in tenor-bass ensembles (Hill, 2021; Palkki, 2016). Although the men's choir is classified by gender, Chris conceptualizes the audition process according to voice type and the type of repertoire the ensemble sings:

Let's oversimplify things to make this really clean. For me, if you can sing tenor or you can sing bass, you have a place in this choir. Because we're going to sing that repertoire. And you have a place in this choir, however you identify. Or if you're nonconforming, whatever it is, you are welcome, and you are celebrated. Your humanity is cherished, and that is the bottom line. That is powerful, when you create space for anybody to belong.

(Interview, 3/4/2021)

I have reflected on what that means for cisgender singers to participate in traditionally single-gender ensembles in ways that may have previously been unfeasible—such as a cisgender male singing in a women’s or treble ensemble, or a cisgender female singing in a men’s or tenor-bass ensemble. For me, this is one of the most difficult aspects to tackle as traditionally single-gender ensembles change their structure. Chris also struggled to wrap his head around what having a cisgender female in his men’s choir would look like, calling his thoughts “unformulated”:

I think with the men’s choir, with them carries a significant social component in both choirs, and so that would need to be a part of the consideration. For me to say something like, “Yes, the only criteria for being qualified to be a member of this choir is that you are a strong musician and can sing tenor or bass.” But then our audition process has two parts to the interview. So I might say, “Yeah. They qualify. They go through the musical component of their audition and they hit the mark, so they're in.” But then they also have an interview with the executive leadership team to kind of find that cultural fit. And so that, in a way, that structure is still helpful because it could be like, “Wow. We have concerns about this potentially not being a good fit for the culture in the ensemble socially,” and then that can really present an interesting conversation, I think. Because to me, there is this sense of: would it be appropriate, if you're a cisgender female or cisgender male who's trained countertenor, for you to sing in a treble chorus where you're the only cisgender male person in a treble voice-oriented ensemble? That is an interesting part of the sticky wicket, so to speak, of the transition. (Interview, 3/4/2021)

The men’s choir at DSU has undergone a number of philosophical changes of the years, and with that has come a change in culture. For example, Chris acknowledged the pervasiveness of homophobia until recent history, and the current culture of the ensemble has created an

environment in which as much as 40% of the ensemble identifies outside of heterosexuality. Jimmy recalled that even until the 1970s, the choir was an all-white organization and was not integrated until well after the Civil Rights Movement. As the choir has shifted its perspectives, philosophies, and ensemble goals, the working definition of “fit” has also evolved. As the DSU men’s choir and many other gendered ensembles (re)consider the gender classification of their ensembles, they will also have to reflect on whether cultural changes within the ensemble happen as a result of evolving membership, or if changing membership forces a change in what it means to “fit” into the ensemble.

Although gendered choirs likely fall into the exceptions category for Title IX in relation to gender discrimination and segregation in education settings, a potential case could be made for a cisgender male or female who wish to sing in a women’s/treble or men’s/tenor-bass ensemble, respectively. Groups such as the Harvard Glee and Whiffenpoofs, which were traditionally men’s choirs, have chosen to move away from gendered classifications and allow women to participate as long as they sing in the range of tenor or bass (Feilbel & Cui, 2018). Membership criteria are among the more complex and nuanced elements that teacher-conductors must consider as they seek to create gender-inclusive ensembles.

Sexuality

Sexuality is an identity that could easily be overlooked in a choral ensemble. For Chris, sexuality is a “majorly impactful” factor in the men’s choir: “Anybody who would try to gloss over the influence of sexuality upon a community of people, and particularly in a community of artists is literally not paying attention” (Interview, 3/4/2021). The culture of the ensemble has made major strides with regard to sexuality in the past ten years, with many relationships coming out of the membership of the men’s choir. In the past, offensive and derogatory terms related to

sexuality would have been commonplace within the ensemble. Now, “there's a beautiful, celebratory, embracing gay culture to the men’s choir singer that is just accepted as standard inside” (Interview, 3/4/2021). Jimmy, a gay singer in the choir, has found the men’s choir to be an accepting space in which he could embrace his sexuality:

I do identify as gay, which wasn't something that I was open about in high school. It was actually the men’s choir and finding that community that made me feel safe to be who I am and just kind of find that community there, as well. (Interview, 2/22/2021)

Chris spoke to the varied sexualities in the choir as an integration that was “seamless” (Interview, 3/4/2021) throughout the ensemble. Recently, the Tenor I section realized that the majority of their section identified as LGBTQIA+, which Jimmy voiced was a first for many of the singers. For minoritized students, representation “[plays] a powerful role in the construction of one’s identity” (Kruse et al., 2015, p. 493), and a positive sense of identity in turn creates a greater sense of self-worth and overall community. From classroom materials, repertoire, and the overall makeup of the ensemble, teachers must actively consider the ways in which students are represented in their classrooms. Simultaneously, teachers must also consider the overall makeup of the ensemble, address areas of weakness with representation and inclusion, and create action plans for addressing potential barriers for entry for minoritized students.

Cisheteronormativity

Because heterosexuality is the presumed dominant sexuality in society, a group of men can be perceived as a group of heterosexual men. As such, the repertoire written for men’s choir often is catered to heterosexual relationships. Chris has considered the way this would impact the students:

I'm very aware of, "Okay, this is a story, a love story, that's oriented around a heterosexual, cisgender male/female relationship, so what does that mean? What does that communicate to our gay singers? How does that impact them? Is that worth programming?" So what I've discovered is my desire to portray music that speaks of love without gender focus. (Interview, 3/4/2021)

In recent years, composers have made concerted efforts to set texts that speak to a variety of perspectives. Palkki (2015) remarked on the value students place on "talk[ing] about deep poetry and be[ing] vulnerable" (p. 28), teacher-conductors should seek to select music that diversifies narratives found in music, as well as music with which students of a variety of identities can identify.

In considering texts that he would no longer program, Chris specifically talked about a piece called "Cindy" and how it embraces both cisheteronormativity and a sense of ownership over women:

I wish I were on apple, a-hanging on a tree,
and every time that Cindy passed, she'd take a bite o' me

...

You ought to see my Cindy, she lives away down south

She's so sweet the honeybees swarm around her mouth

....

My Cindy is a pretty girl, my Cindy is a peach

She throws her arms around my neck and hangs on like a leech.

As a college student, I remember singing this song in a mixed ensemble. Never once did it cross my mind that I was singing a love song to a woman. Would my male peers have accepted if they

sang a love song directed at a man? I can only speculate, but I also cannot think of a time where I have sung a love song directed at a male in a mixed ensemble. (Memo, 3/4/2021)

When I asked Jimmy about his experience singing love songs as a gay man in a men's choir, he, too, had experienced heterosexual love songs as the "norm" without reflecting on its implications:

Honestly, that's not something that I've thought of before, but now that you're bringing it up, we have never sung a piece that was directed towards a guy. Which is funny, because a very, *very* large portion of our choir—not the majority, but I'd say around 40% of our organization—is LGBTQ-identifying. (Interview, 2/22/2021)

For Jimmy, the heteronormative nature of music such as love songs is rooted in the fact that men's choirs have traditionally been presumed to be made up of heterosexual males, meaning that composers wrote from or for that viewpoint. "In fact," Jimmy posited, "I can't name a *single* piece of repertoire that's made for a men's vocal ensemble that would be directed towards another man, in terms of a romance setting" (Interview, 2/22/2021).

When I asked Jimmy how the choir might respond if Professor Miller programmed a piece from a gay perspective, he smiled: "Forgive me for saying this: the gay voices in our choir are very loud, and so it would be a raucous support of it" (Interview, 2/22/2021). He felt that all the choristers would be in support of a non-traditional narrative but that external forces may not:

I think the biggest issue would come from our audience, and that's where the fear stems from: like, how would our alumni react to this, which is our biggest donors and supporting base. How would our audience feel about this? I would be more than willing to test that boundary. I don't know if it's financially a smart move for us, but I'd be willing to take that risk. (Interview, 2/22/2021)

Choral textbooks have a long history of perpetuating misogynistic and homophobic stereotypes (Koza, 1993a; McBride & Palkki, 2020), which is also reflected in the type of repertoire available for choirs. As a singer, I have been a part of concert programs in which teacher-conductors were accused of “politicizing” music, when in reality, they were diversifying the narratives present in choral ensembles. Jimmy’s comment reflects the potential willingness singers and their teacher-conductors may have to push the boundaries of choral traditions for the greater goal of representation, even if it may result in pushback from student bodies, colleges, and communities.

What Lies Ahead: Gender Inclusion in Gendered Ensembles

Name Change

As Chris and I talked about the future of the men’s choir in relation to gender and inclusion, he shared the current dynamics of the men’s choir within the department of music: “The conversation of the name change is very real right now, and I think there’s going to be a seismic shift” (Interview, 3/4/2021). The women’s choir, for example, has decided that they are going to reclassify their ensemble as a treble ensemble. Although Chris is not the director of choral activities or in a departmental leadership role, he is privy to discussions taking place within the choral and music department administrations as they discuss the greater philosophy of the choirs at DSU and how that relates to gender. “Naming and identity are always in deep relationship,” (Interview, 4/4/2021) Chris reflected, “and as long as those are in tension, it’s going to be a barrier for entry” (Interview, 4/4/2021). As the students and administration discuss inclusion efforts for the men’s and women’s choirs, Chris believes the end result will inevitably lead to both symbolic and structural change: “I would bet the ranch that in the next two to four

years, the names of the men's and women's choirs at Dawson State University are gonna be gone. I would be willing to bet" (Interview, 3/4/2021).

In the conversations I have had with choir conductors about traditionally single-gender ensembles, some conductors have had concerns or hesitations about moving away from gendered classifications for choirs. For Chris, reclassifying the ensembles would align more closely with his personal philosophy:

I am completely in support of the name change. In fact, I think it's long overdue. And I know that there's a very entrenched alumni face that is going to struggle with it. But I think our students will embrace it. I think they will absolutely embrace it and that it will create a significantly more inclusive and welcoming external face. I think we do inclusion and welcoming internally pretty well, but the symbol and meaning of names is huge when it comes to how people view what you are and what you do externally. And so that, to me, is just an essential part of being a choral organization in the 21st century.

(Interview, 3/4/2021)

A number of factors contribute both to the internal and external perceptions of the ensembles. Although some may perceive the more visible aspects of the choir—such as the name of the ensemble and the uniforms worn by the singers—as merely symbolic to the mission of the ensemble, the name and uniform are both crucial in the external perceptions of the ensemble, particularly in relation to gender inclusivity.

Although a name change could logistically happen within a semester, Dawson State University will likely take time to engage current and former members with the discussion:

With institutional transitions, the process really matters. Process is key, and how you do it will set everything up for the most success. I think it would start at the administrative

and faculty levels to have these conversations, listening sessions with students, to hear where people are, how they're thinking about it, what their concerns are, if any, and then what's the pathway forward? What are the ideas? What's the actual meaning? And then I think we also would have a campaign of sorts engaging the alumni—not that they have a say so much as just an opportunity to be heard. I think that would be important. And the ultimate decision will be made probably from an administrative level, with a ton of student input, is my guess. So I think that will take a good chunk of at least one academic year to navigate and kind of make our way through the conversation. (Interview, 3/4/2021)

The men's and women's choirs at the university are separate classes and student organizations, they are intrinsically linked by name and university function. Because of their connection, there will be careful consideration about how the organizations interact moving forward:

I'm excited about the prospect, and I think there are ways to do it which will celebrate the unique aspects of both choirs and signify a way for us to have unique, individual ensembles, but perhaps even a singular identity of sorts under the banner of the Dawson State University Student Organization Choirs. But then, like you can imagine, the complications when you start thinking about money and thinking about traditions and a lot of the historical baggage, some of which is great, some of which is problematic. (Interview, 3/4/2021)

Chris is well aware of the sentimental value the name of the ensemble has for current and former members of the men's choir and is prepared for singers and alumni to struggle with the change:

I think some of those more material aspects of change that are going to be the stickiest parts of changing the choir or ultimately the name. Okay, if you change your name and you're no longer the DSU Men's Choir—you can't just change your name and do everything else the same, right? You have to examine *everything* of how you do what you do. You can't just isolate it to, "Well, we've done our job." *No*. It doesn't work that way. So I think that's going to be really significant for the men's choir to negotiate. (Interview, 4/4/2021)

At the end of the day, Chris believes the students are ultimately willing to make changes to the ensemble in the name of inclusion:

My impression is that the students are very intent upon becoming the kind of place where they're willing to lose identity for the sake of gaining a greater kind of experience of diversity and celebrating all of that. And to change in those kinds of ways means you have to give things up. You can't just have it the way it's always been. And I think students are starting to understand that, and that's part of how you grow and change, is you have to be willing to let go and to sacrifice some of those comforts, or whatever it might be, that you've held on to or have adopted over the history of the organization. (Interview, 12/10/2020)

Chris knows there is more work to be done beyond a name change, such as membership policies, and uniforms: "The name isn't going to change everything, but it's going to make it better. It will make it better, and that I see as a positive thing" (Interview, 4/4/2021). Chris's perspective speaks to the struggle many teacher-conductors may feel as they determine the best path forward: small incremental changes or large structural change. Some teacher-conductors may teach at schools where students and community members push for administrators to make change. For

teacher-conductors in communities where LGBTQIA+ rights are hotly debated, they may find that reclassifying or renaming the ensemble without student or community input is necessary in order to create more inclusive spaces for students of a variety of gender identities. Chris theorized that the change within the men's choir would be slow so as to allow for community input and education, but before the conversations began at the community level, the women's choir made the decision to reclassify themselves as a treble ensemble. Teacher-conductors may find themselves in positions where various community or administrative figures are seeking change in order to create more inclusive ensembles. I sense that the conversation surrounding the ethics of women's and men's choirs will only grow louder. As such, I advocate for teacher-conductors to examine policies related to gender inclusivity and make decisions based on research and feedback, rather than have decisions inadvertently thrust upon them by communities and administrators.

National Conversation About Traditionally Single-Gender Ensembles

The topic of gendered choral ensembles continues to permeate the discourse within the United States' choral community (Palkki, 2016; Hill, 2021). As Chris considered the conversations and events that are leading to a name change at his university, I asked him to contextualize the DSU men's choir within the national conversation surrounding gendered choirs. As he considered where men's and women's choirs are headed at a national level, he wondered if change "is going to happen from the itty bitty up, or from the old and down to the itty bitties?" (Interview, 4/4/2021). Within the institution of DSU, Chris is witnessing a desire for change both from the "itty bitties"—the current choir members—and from "the old"—the conductors, administrators, and torchbearers for the choirs at Dawson State.

Treble and Tenor-Bass Repertoire

Regardless of the rationale for the structure and organization of choral ensembles, there is no denying that choirs that sing treble and tenor-bass repertoire offer a unique experience to both singers and audience members:

As we value and hold up repertoire that's oriented toward low voices, repertoire oriented toward treble voices and want to do that repertoire, then we're gonna have the question of how do we navigate that? How do we do that? How do we organize our institutions in such a way that allows them to do that with integrity, and yet also honors the standards and practices of inclusivity that we believe are essential to the pride and future of the arts? (Interview, 4/4/2021)

Some conductors may choose to move away from treble and tenor-bass ensembles altogether. Although Chris doesn't see "a world where that repertoire is de-platformed and we just stop using it as part of performance and part of education," but he also said "I don't think that would be the end of the world. I would be *surprised* if that happened, but I guess a 15-year-ago version of me would be surprised that I'm saying all the things that I'm saying today" (Interview, 4/4/2021).

At the beginning of this section, Chris wondered if structural change would come from the top-down—from national, regional, and university leadership—or from the bottom up—from students and individual choir conductors. Regardless of where change comes from, Chris places faith in singers to advocate for inclusivity, even if it means making changes to how the men's choir functions:

Our students really have everything in them to lead the way. At the end of the day, I think the desire is for that space to be undeniably welcoming. I just don't see in my students a

desire to double down on, “Well, sorry. We'd rather just be exclusive then.” No, I don't see that. I see this desire to really say, “What matters most is that people were invited into this in a very real and open and hospitable embrace.” (Interview, 3/4/2021)

Because of the types of relationships Chris has curated between himself and the singers, particularly in relation to DEI efforts, Chris is intimately aware of the value singers place on men's spaces as well as their struggle to embrace those spaces when they may be acting in an exclusionary manner. Because Chris views the name and classification change of the men's choir as essential, his personal philosophy may very well go on to influence the attitudes and opinions of the members of the DSU men's choir. Teacher-conductors have a vital role to play with regard to the culture of gender within choral ensembles. Chris is among the teacher-conductors that use gendered ensembles as a vessel for interrogating gender in choral organizations.

Summary

The men's choir at Dawson State University is a long-standing musical and social institution at the university. The three central tenets of the ensemble—history, community, and artistry—influence the way that the ensemble has functioned historically and how the choir thinks toward the future. The men's choir has a problematic past related to race and sexuality, and both Chris and the student organization strive to engage in meaningful social justice efforts to evolve the culture of the ensemble so that it is centered on inclusion of various minoritized identities.

Chris and the men's choir students carefully considered the ways that various identities—such as race, sexuality, and gender—play into the dynamics of the Dawson State University men's choir and the relationship they have with the women's choir. They all noted the important role that men's choirs have played in their musical and social development while wrestling with

the implications of men's choirs for trans and gender-expansive singers. Specific considerations related to gender included the role of men's spaces, literature selection, uniform, the assumed correlation between voice part and perceived gender, and ultimately the name and membership of the ensemble.

Alumni have a significant presence within the organization, especially related to finances. Although Chris and the students sense there would be pushback from the alumni if the organization were to move away from its current gendered name and structure, Chris and the men's choir members ultimately see the alumni as a force of support. Given the relationship the organization has with its alumni, any discussion of change would include a forum in which the alumni could have their voices heard.

Conversations about structural change—including moving away from classifying the choir as a men's choir—are currently happening at a department level at Dawson State University. The sister organization to the men's choir—the women's choir—has made an executive decision to change their name and structure to center on treble voices rather than gender explicitly, which has caused the men's choir executive board to consider the future of their ensemble's name and structure. Chris sees a move away from being a men's choir as inevitable and is in full support of reclassifying the choir as a tenor-bass ensemble rather than a men's choir. He believes that some of the more material aspects of the organization—such as the uniform and the name itself—will be among the most difficult for students, alumni, and the community to let go, but ultimately, Chris sees the men's choir singers as people who prioritize inclusion over exclusion.

CHAPTER 8: DISCUSSION OF CROSS-PARTICIPANT THEMES

In this chapter, I discuss themes that emerged from interviews with Megan and Chris, as well as their students. Five major themes emerged: meaning-making, stereotypes and assumptions, policies and practices, communication, and allyship, with each theme containing a number of subthemes. As I interviewed the participants, the previously stated themes emerged in the order in which I presented them. Because the choirs were related to gender, the participants began their journey through this project examining their relationship with gender and the ensembles as they determined the values and challenges of the space. Throughout the process, the participants identified negative stereotypes and assumptions related to gender, singing, and gendered choral ensembles, and challenged the stereotypes and assumptions as part of determining a greater sense of meaning and purpose in the choirs. In an effort to address inclusivity in the ensembles, the participants evaluated the policies and practices to determine where they felt they were being inclusive and identify the areas in which they needed to grow. Communication was essential as they examined policies and practices, and discussions surrounding inclusion led to the participants coming to understand their role as allies to the LGBTQIA+ community.

Throughout my interactions with Megan, Chris and the choir students, they frequently expressed a multitude of perceptions and feelings that were, at times, at odds with one another, and noted the difficulty of negotiating conflicting feelings and experiences. Embracing the nature of narrative inquiry, I have sought to address a number of puzzles with a nuanced approach that explicitly speaks to the complex and conflicted feelings of the participants. Similar to Thomas-Durrell's (2019) dissertation, these themes do not exist as separate ideas, but rather as ones that are interrelated to one another, with each playing a vital role in the construction of the

participants' individual identities, as well as their perceptions of inclusivity in the choirs. My desire to embrace the nuance of gender in choir, as well as conflicting opinions and experiences within the individuals and choir, led to me utilizing multiple frameworks—feminism, queer theory, and trans theory—as a means for highlighting various perspectives and attempting to embrace an intersectional approach to the dissertation. Throughout the project and this chapter, I employ multiple frameworks as a means to interrogate my biases and assumptions related to gender and inclusivity. The frameworks will continue to play a role as I discuss the implications of these findings in Chapter 9.

Meaning-Making

As Megan, Chris, and the singers considered inclusion in traditionally single-gender ensembles, one of the themes most present was discerning the meaning and purpose of the choirs. They considered whether the purpose of the ensemble was to bond over shared experience related to gender, if single-gender ensembles were more related to gender or voice type, and if the ensembles had a mission that centered on diversity, equity, and inclusion. I considered the various ways in which the teacher-conductors and students defined and constructed meaning-making within the ensemble below.

Gendered Spaces

The Value

There is a longstanding tradition of gendered choirs in the United States (Palkki, 2016). Both female (Bartolome, 2013; Gauthier, 2005; O'Toole, 1998; Wilson, 2013) and male (Elorriaga, 2011; Freer, 2009a, 2009b; Ramsey, 2013) singers may see women's and men's choirs as places in which they can develop a variety of identities ranging from musical to social. Megan, Chris, and the choir students all noted the value of being in a space with people who had

similar experiences based on their gender and referred to the gendered nature of the ensemble as one that was empowering and created a sense of community, belonging, camaraderie, and friendship.

In middle school, Chris initially resisted joining choir because he was focused on popularity and felt that singing was contrary to his social goals. It wasn't until the choir teacher at his school started an all-boy ensemble that Chris felt comfortable joining choir. Chris pointed to this experience as essential in developing his lifelong love of singing and a special connection with and affinity for men's and tenor-bass ensemble repertoire. The singers in the men's choir echoed similar sentiments, particularly for those who were teased for singing in men's choirs because of cisheteronormative social expectations. The students noted the empowering experience of singing in a large group of men in college after years of being socially ostracized for their involvement in singing as men. Chris specifically used men's choirs as a space for "softening the underbelly of your typical college male" (Interview, 11/9/2020), which included addressing mental health, a topic typically taboo for men in the United States (Chatmon, 2020).

A number of singers had negative perceptions of women's choirs based on previous experiences but were able to develop a new concept of women's choirs and the benefits therein. Although Megan sang in a women's choir in high school, her perception of gender as related to choir was initially only related to the fact that she felt her teacher preferred and catered to male singers. It wasn't until she sang in a women's choir after her master's degree and saw a high-quality women's choir performance that she saw women's choirs as a space for female empowerment and challenging sexist stereotypes that are pervasive in choral music. Megan specifically programmed repertoire to address various social justice topics and to create a sense of community and belonging for female singers who have potentially spent years believing they

were seen as inferior within the great structure of choral programs. Because of the negative associations of women's choirs (Gauthier, 2005; Wilson, 2013), women's choir conductors are often aware of the need to win singers over (Snow 2012). For conductors seeking to address inequitable attitudes toward women's choirs, O'Toole (1998) advocated for conductors to create opportunities unique to the women's choirs, such as festivals and tours, and to offer an auditioned women's choir as part of a robust choral program.

For trans and gender-expansive individuals, inclusion in traditionally single-gender spaces—such as sports teams or bathrooms—“promote[s] values of non-discrimination and inclusion” among all participants (ACLU, 2020). Because many participants found women's and men's spaces to be validating and empowering experiences for women and men, respectively, it is essential that these spaces also include trans women and men in order to be gender-inclusive. Megan and Chris pointed to examples of trans women and men who felt validated in their gender identity through involvement in gendered choirs. A few students voiced concern that moving away from a gendered model of ensemble make-up—such as treble choirs rather than women's choirs—would remove the chance for trans singers to feel accepted for their gender identity in gendered spaces. Later in this chapter, I will discuss Megan and Chris's evolving philosophies on gendered ensembles and how women's, treble, men's, and tenor-bass choirs can be empowering to students of a variety of gender identities.

The Challenge

When Megan, Chris, and the singers considered the structure, make-up, and policies surrounding the women's and men's choirs, they consistently struggled with the concept of gender inclusion in spaces defined by gender exclusion. Specifically, the conductors and singers considered whether trans and gender-expansive singers would or could feel welcome in a space

that centered on gender. Because the singers and conductors sought to create a space that was empowering and inclusive, they had concerns that the gendered nature of the ensemble might make the space appear to be exclusive, particularly for trans and gender-expansive singers. Both conductors (Hill, 2021) and students (Palkki, 2016) have noted the important role that an ensemble's name has with regards to its perceived inclusivity, with Hill (2021) choosing to move away from conducting a "women's choir" to one classified as a treble choir in an effort to be more inclusive to trans and gender-expansive singers. Throughout his research on trans singers in choral ensembles, Palkki (2015, 2016) said that while "there are no easy answers" with relation to gendered ensembles, "ensemble name changes may be necessary" (Palkki, 2016, p. 302) to create more gender-inclusive ensembles. For conductors who choose to continue with ensembles classified by gender, they must ensure that women's choirs serve "*all* women—including trans women" (p. 302).

Although I did not interview any trans or gender-expansive singers in the men's choir, multiple singers in the women's choir identified as trans or gender-expansive and highlighted some of the challenges of participating in an ensemble that did not align with their gender identity. The singers acknowledged the lack of trans and gender-expansive representation within their ensemble membership and that elements of the gendered ensemble were not inherently inclusive of trans and gender-expansive singers. Overall, the participants felt that classifying choirs by gender projected an image that was not inherently inclusive to a variety of gender identities and expressions. As a result, they felt that trans or gender-expansive singers may not feel welcome to join the ensemble.

In recent years, the inclusion of trans and gender-expansive individuals has been a heated topic in society, from bathrooms (Carter, 2018; Hershey & Johnson, 2017), to women's colleges

(Caplan-Bricker, 2019; Eaton-Robb, 2020; Degregory, 2021), to sports teams (Block, 2021; Buzuvis, 2017; Dawson, 2020). In recent years, conductors have been more cognizant of the impact that gendered ensembles have on trans and gender-expansive singers and choral ensembles. Scholars such as Palkki (2016) and Hill (2021) have acknowledged the value that some singers have garnered from women's and men's choirs while simultaneously acknowledging that moving away from gendered choirs—women's and men's choirs—and toward ensembles classified by voice type—treble choirs for sopranos and altos and tenor-bass choirs for tenors and basses—may foster environments that are more inclusive of a variety of gender identities.

Repertoire Selection

Megan and Chris acknowledged the stereotypical nature of women's and men's choir music, noting women's choirs' traditional focus on nature and love songs and men's choirs singing sea chanteys and drinking songs. In an attempt to create deeper meaning within the ensembles, both Megan and Chris specifically chose repertoire that challenged gender stereotypes, with the women's choir singing songs of female empowerment and the men's choir tackling subjects often taboo for men, such as mental health (Chatmon, 2020). They also saw repertoire selection as a means for talking about social justice issues and centering the work of underrepresented composers, such as women and people of color.

Because of their repertoire selection, the conductors and singers talked about a greater sense of meaning and purpose as they connected to the meaningful texts that they sang. The students came to see the feminist nature of the women's choir music as central to the ensemble's identity. For members of the men's choir, the repertoire he chose gave them a way to understand their identity as men and to unpack harmful stereotypes and social pressures. In addition to

mental health, Chris strove to select music that wasn't hetero-specific while "singing with a cause in mind" (Interview, 12/10/2020). The singers in the women's choir appreciated the perspectives of the music they sang, saying that the discourses in the music were different from those they had experienced in mixed choirs in the past and that the choir was able to focus on women's issues because of the female-centric nature of the ensemble.

Although men and women may benefit from music that is male- or female-centric, LGBTQIA+ students may find that singing repertoire focusing on cisheteronormative perspectives can be an alienating experience (Palkki, 2015, 2016, 2017). For example, Michael—a trans man in the women's choir—felt that he was not able to connect to the pieces or engage in discussions that focused on women's issues because that was not his experience. As he relayed conversations with trans and gender-expansive peers, Michael talked about repertoire selection as something that could be either welcoming or create a barrier for trans and gender-expansive singers considering joining a women's or men's choir. Michael noted specific examples where Megan programmed music that was not gender-specific and had intentionally broad text to allow students of a variety of minoritized identities to connect to the piece.

Because music teachers have a considerable amount of autonomy when determining their curriculum, conductors must carefully consider the role that repertoire plays in creating an inclusive environment. Scholars such as O'Toole (1998) and Palkki (2015) have advocated for moving away from heteronormative and misogynistic repertoire, with Palkki specifically noting the importance of "modeling a spectrum of masculinities" (p. 30) in choir programs as a way to push back against gender assumptions and stereotypes. Although scholars have highlighted the need for LGBTQIA+-inclusive curricula, including centering LGBTQIA+ experiences (Palkki, 2015; Paparo & Sweet, 2014; Taylor, 2011), music education literature has been slower to

discuss LGBTQIA+ topics in practitioner journals as compared to other art disciplines (Freer, 2013). In recent years, composers have begun exploring and challenging gender stereotypes in the texts they set (Palkki, 2015). Repertoire selection plays a vital role in determining meaning within an ensemble, and conductors must consider the messages repertoire selection sends in determining meaning and self-worth within a given choir.

Gender, or Voice Type?

The conductors and singers all expressed the value of singing in men's and women's choirs because of the camaraderie developed between singers because of shared experience, as well as the specific sound of men's and women's choirs based on voice types. As they considered a path forward for their ensembles, they wrestled with whether the ensemble would be focused on gender experiences or the type of literature the choir focused on.

Choirs that perform literature focusing on soprano-alto voices and tenor-bass voices have traditionally been classified by gender (i.e., women's and men's choirs, respectively).

Throughout the interviews, participants acknowledged that choirs have also assumed that all women's choirs have only soprano and alto singers and that men's choirs are comprised solely of tenors and basses. As a result of these assumptions, trans women who sing bass or trans men who sing soprano may experience barriers to joining these ensembles.

Megan, Chris, and the singers each struggled to determine to what degree gender and voice type contribute to ensemble classification. Chris noted that soprano-alto, tenor-bass, women's, treble, and men's choirs exist, at least in part, because people value soprano-alto and tenor-bass repertoire. One possible scenario for moving away from gendered classifications is to classify ensembles by voice part (Hill, 2021; Palkki, 2016). However, classifying ensembles by voice part makes room for cisgender men to sing soprano-alto literature and for cisgender

women to sing tenor-bass literature. Although some cisgender men train as countertenors, it is still largely against the norm for cisgender men and women to sing voice parts that are not typically associated with their gender. Both Megan and Chris struggled to determine the best way forward with cisgender singers seeking to be in ensembles traditionally classified by gender. I will discuss this more in the section on Policies and Practices

Stereotypes and Assumptions

In interrogating inclusion in women's and men's choirs, Megan, Chris, and the students interrogated assumptions they or others have made about gender, choir, or music. Throughout music education, a number of scholars have studied the existence and implications of gender stereotypes and assumptions pervasive in music, ranging from instrument selection (Abeles, 2009; Conway, 2000; Gathen, 2014; Harrison & O'Neill, 2000; Kelly & VanWeelden, 2014), the "missing male" (Freer, 2009b, 2015; Harrison, 2004; Harrison, 2007; Kennedy, 2002, 2004; Koza, 1993; O'Toole, 1998), and recruitment techniques (Barham, 2001; Reed, 2008; Trott, 2020). Additionally, the participants also echoed assumptions that I have heard over the years that are not explicitly backed by research. Both Koza (1993-1994) and McBride and Palkki (2020) specifically looked at choral methods texts and unpacked some of the implications on stereotypes and assumptions on choral students and educators. There is still much work to be done in music education to investigate the origins and consequences of gender stereotypes in the field. Below, I will specifically talk about perceptions and attitudes surrounding women's and men's choirs, trans and gender-expansive singers, and assuming gender according to gender expression, and making and changing assumptions.

Women's, Treble, Men's, and Tenor-Bass Ensembles

Perceived Prestige and Respect (Or Lack Thereof)

When Megan began teaching at LU, it was apparent to her that the women's choir was seen as inferior to the other choral ensembles on campus. Initially, she focused on creating quality music in the choral ensemble as a way to encourage singers and their peers to have a more positive perception of the choir, but over time, she realized that many of the negative perceptions about the women's choir were not necessarily musical, but social. For the singers who had negative perceptions of women's choirs prior to or during the study, many of the reasons they saw women's choirs in a negative light were for social reasons. In their experience, the singers thought women's choirs had more drama, particularly in comparison with their experiences in mixed choirs. Participants in Gauthier's (2005) study echoed similar perceptions about the social environment of women's choirs. Given the traditional choral hierarchies that privileged mixed ensembles (O'Toole, 1998), students felt that singers in mixed ensembles took the choral experience more seriously than if they were in a women's choir. They also saw women's choirs as inferior in the hierarchy of ensembles in their school choral programs and viewed the women's choir as a place to put singers who were not selected to sing in the top ensemble at the university. Since the 1990s, scholars such as Gauthier (2005), O'Toole (1998), and Wilson (2013) have all noted that women's choirs are typically viewed as less prestigious or desirable compared to men's choirs and mixed ensembles.

Although some students noted that they would still prefer to sing in the auditioned mixed ensembles, many students said that their negative perceptions of women's choirs dissipated after joining the women's ensemble at Lowell University. Over the years, Megan felt that the unfavorable opinions of the women's choir had largely dissipated, though she heard some of the

negative sentiments returning to the choir over the course of the project. Because the project took place during the COVID-19 pandemic, she wondered if some of those negative perceptions were specifically tied to their negative experiences or opinions of women's choirs that were cultivated in their high school choir programs. Participants in Major's (2017) study spoke to this sentiment, with one participant saying they felt that negative associations with women's choirs came from attitudes present in high school music programs and that women's choirs often consist of members who had hoped to be in a more select ensemble. Bartolome (2013) and Parker (2018) are among the scholars that argue that women's choirs can be places for female singers to work against these negative stereotypes and that women's choirs can contribute to increased confidence and feelings of self-worth for female participants. It is important to stress, however, that many of the negative associations with women's and treble choirs are not the result of policies implemented by individual teacher-conductors in isolated situations, but rather are symptoms of a larger system that devalues female and treble singers. Teacher-conductors must challenge and change policies and practices that are within their control while simultaneously acknowledging the limitations of working within a system that functions under cisheteronormative privilege.

A number of the women's choir students stated that one of the reasons they did not like to sing in women's choirs was because mixed choirs had a fuller sound because of the addition of tenors and basses. Gauthier (2005) and Wilson (2010, 2012, 2013) also found that value placed on treble and mixed ensembles appears to be, at least for some singers, related to the type of sound that these different ensembles produce. Previously, Chris also felt the same way, saying that women's choirs "just didn't do it" (Interview, 11/9/2020), for him, but after seeing a meaningful women's choir performance at a national choral conference, he reframed his mindset

and began looking at choirs for the quality of their performance, and not specifically on the type of voices that were singing. Chris's reframing mirrors that of the argument Sieck (2017) made that mixed choirs are not inherently superior to women's, men's, treble, and tenor-bass ensembles, but rather that listeners are conditioned to see mixed choirs as superior in sound because they are often classified as the auditioned, and thus most prestigious, ensemble in a choir program (O'Toole, 1998; Gauthier, 2005).

Chris and the singers all noted the unique and meaningful experience of singing in men's and tenor-bass choirs, especially since choir programs typically have fewer men enrolled in their programs (Elpus & Abril, 2019; O'Toole, 1998). Because of enrollment numbers, a number of scholars and music educators have encouraged conductors to use men's choirs as a recruitment tool to boost the self-esteem of male singers and create a sense of belonging with male peers (Barham, 2001; Phillips, 2003; Trott, 2020). O'Toole (1998) argued that men's choirs are seen as superior to women's choirs in traditional choral hierarchies, despite the fact that women's and men's choirs are often utilized for similar purposes, such as voice building and recruitment.

In my personal experience as a singer, teacher, conference attendee, and audience member, I have found that men's choirs are often received more positively than women's choirs, in part because listeners feel that men singing is unique and that the repertoire stereotypically associated with men's choirs focuses on humor and masculine ideals. For singers in women's and treble choirs who may feel that they put in just as much, if not more, effort into rehearsals and performances than those in men's and tenor-bass ensembles, it can be challenging to feel they are perceived as lesser-than. As such, it is not difficult to draw the conclusion that singers in women's and treble choirs may have lower musical and personal self-esteem as a direct result of their gender and voice type. Although conductors cannot change society's perceptions,

expectations, and value judgements attached to gender, they do have considerable influence over the culture of their choral ensembles and the ways in which gender is discussed and valued. Educators must be intentional in the way they discuss gender with regards to recruitment, literature selection, and uniform. By acknowledging and discussing value judgements associated with gender, conductors can directly interrogate negative stereotypes and assumptions within the choir and work to defy such negative perceptions.

Trans and Gender-Expansive Singers

Because discourse surrounding trans and gender-expansive students is relatively new in music education research (see Nichols, 2013), there is much to learn about the needs of trans and gender-expansive singers and the ways in which teachers and singers can support students and peers of a variety of gender identities. As I listened to Megan, Chris, and the women's and men's choir students consider the nuances of gender in traditionally single-gender choral ensembles, I found myself questioning some of the assumptions that I have heard surrounding trans and gender-expansive singers. Below, I will interrogate concerns about voice classification, vocal health, and ensemble make up.

Voice Classification and Vocal Health

For some trans and gender-expansive singers, their speaking and singing voice is an integral part of their gender identity and expression (Palkki, 2016; Sauerland, 2018). Both Megan and Chris gave trans and gender-expansive singers agency with regards to the voice part that the students would sing in the choir. As Megan worked with a student who previously sang baritone and wanted to sing in the women's choir, Megan recognized that she had zero training on working with trans singers and was concerned about the students' vocal health, saying "I never quite knew what was right in that case" (Interview, 11/17/2020). Michael, a trans man in the

women's choir who had not disclosed his gender identity, recalled hearing people voice concerns about hormone therapy and its impact on vocal health. He challenged that assumption, noting that he believed the effect of testosterone on a trans man's voice would have similar effects to those experienced by adolescent males going through puberty. All of these viewpoints highlight the necessity for research on trans and gender-expansive singers, as well as open communication with students to ensure that their needs and priorities are being met.

As teachers consider voice assignments for students, they should also consider the implications and ramifications of assigning students to a single voice part, rather than rotating students through voice parts (i.e., singing soprano on half of the songs and alto on the other half). Sweet and Parker (2019), two professors of choral music education, reflected on their own experiences as singers and found that some of their insecurities with particular parts of their range were related to being prematurely assigned exclusively to sing alto in choir. Sweet (2018) found her own experiences reflected in those of collegiate choral singers who had only sang "the most accessible vocal lines during voice change," rather than exploring "singing notes outside of that assigned voice part" (p. 142).

Although I have found many music teachers that are willing to have students rotate through voice parts throughout elementary and middle school, I have found that this practice is less common in high school and college settings, particularly in auditioned ensembles. I have also noted educators such as Sweet and Parker (2019) and Gackle (2011) suggest rotating adolescent female singers through voice parts without doing the same for male singers, when many students who are classified as a baritone could likely sing either tenor or bass in any given concert, depending on the range and tessitura of a piece. As a middle school choir teacher, I was reluctant to rotate singers through parts and justified it because of what I perceived to be student

preference for certain parts and for maximizing students' skills. As I began to interrogate those feelings deeper, I realized that much of my resistance to having students sing a variety of voice parts was because I wanted the choirs to sound as good as possible, and I assigned students to voice parts based on my musical preferences. By rotating singers through voice parts, teachers can encourage students to explore different parts of their range, minimize anxiety about the extremes of their ranges or using chest voice, open their minds to parts of their range with which they are least familiar, and increase their skills in singing melody and harmony across parts in various musical styles.

Ensemble Make-Up

Trans and gender-expansive singers who sing in gendered ensembles may find the experience to be a validation of their gender identity, while others may find the experience to be alienating. In Palkki's (2016) narrative case study, the trans participants had complicated relationships with gendered ensembles, such as men's and women's choirs, as they recognized the merits gendered choirs may have for both cisgender and transgender singers. They simultaneously highlighted the ways in which trans and gender-expansive singers may feel alienated by gendered ensembles, such as voice type, uniform, literature selection, and student changing rooms before performances. As noted previously, Palkki suggested that ensemble name changes may be necessary, but for programs that continue to have gendered choir programs, teachers must ensure that choirs have inclusive policies for trans and gender-expansive singers.

Although Megan and Chris spoke of specific examples of trans and gender-expansive singers feeling validated by gendered ensembles, there were not any trans or gender-expansive students in the study that personally shared feelings of validation. Because I only conducted one individual interview with a trans student, and that student felt disconnected from the ensemble

because of its gender label, I wished I had the opportunity to gain perspectives from more trans and gender-expansive students who either had or had not disclosed their gender identity within a women's or men's choir. Both Megan, Chris, and the singers in the women's and men's choirs all felt gendered spaces could be validating for a variety of gender identities, but I was concerned at the notion that a small percentage of students feeling validated would overshadow the reality that many trans students likely feel invalidated by the experience. More research must be conducted to center trans and gender-expansive perspectives in music education research to better understand the nuanced aspects of (in)validation in gendered ensembles.

Although Megan and Chris both provided examples of students who valued being accepted for their gender identity in gendered spaces, a trans student highlighted that for those who are outside of the ensemble and music program, seeing a choir classified by gender can be a barrier to entry. Cisgender students also noted that for people who experience discrimination on the basis of their gender identity, the existence of a gendered ensemble may make students believe the ensembles embrace a gender binary system and are thus unwelcoming to students who are trans or gender-expansive. This is an example of how assumptions from outside the ensemble can impact the demographic make-up of the ensemble as well as the opinions and perspectives represented within.

(Not) Assuming Gender

In the women's and men's choirs, both conductors and singers currently or previously made assumptions about the gender of the ensemble members. Each of these assumptions appeared to be related to the fact that the choirs were classified by gender or that voice parts have traditionally been associated with gender (i.e., women singing soprano and alto, and men singing tenor and bass). The three men's choir students with whom I spoke each stated that there had

never been a trans man in the men's choir, and multiple members of the women's choir made statements about all of the singers in the ensemble being women. In the women's choir, three students anonymously identified themselves as trans and gender-expansive, and one student had the pronouns "she/they" listed after their name on Zoom. In the men's choir, Chris noted that there currently was a trans singer in the choir but that unless the student disclosed their gender identity to the choir, there was no way that their peers would have known.

Disclosing one's gender identity, which is colloquially known as "coming out," is a complex and layered process that is dependent on the context of an individual (Palkki, 2016). As one participant shared, although he knew Megan and his peers would welcome him as a trans man in the women's choir, he said it was much more difficult for him to disclose his gender identity after people have already assumed he is a woman, rather than introducing himself to someone initially as a man. Based on my observations in this dissertation, I am concerned that gendered spaces may make individuals less likely to disclose their gender identity if it is not aligned with the gendered identity of the group.

Assuming the gender of someone, presumably based on their gender expression (i.e., voice part, hair, clothing, body type, etc.) can have negative consequences for trans and gender-expansive singers. In the women's choir, multiple trans and gender-expansive students said that students assuming that all singers were cisgender made them wonder if they were accepted, if they belonged, and if the choir was a safe space for them as trans and gender-expansive singers. For conductors that make assumptions about a students' gender based on their gender expression, students may not feel comfortable disclosing their gender identity in the future. Because approximately 1 in 167 adults in the United States identify as trans (Flores et al., 2016), it is likely, if not inevitable, that the men's and women's choirs have had trans and gender-expansive

singers in the past that may not have disclosed their identity to the conductor or choir. By acknowledging that students may not feel they can safely disclose their identity currently or in the past, teachers and students can more deeply interrogate assumptions they have about women's, treble, men's, and tenor-bass ensembles, policies that have come about because of those assumptions, and how the choir and choir program can more directly address barriers that limit trans and gender-expansive students' ability to safely engage in choral ensembles.

Because multiple students have disclosed their gender identities to Megan and Chris, they both have worked to not assume the gender of students, which has included referring to students with titles such as "singers," "tenors," "sopranos," or "musicians." Degendering language is one of the ways that conductors can signal to students that they seek to not make assumptions about students' identities and that singers of a variety of gender identities are welcome in the ensemble (Palkki, 2015). After hearing their students make assumptions about their peers' gender identities, Megan and Chris voiced their desire to do more to check in with trans and gender-expansive students to ensure that they as teachers were employing equitable gender practices within the ensemble and fostering an environment centered on inclusion and belonging.

While listening to Megan and Chris, I also interrogated my own assumptions surrounding gender identity based on how students outwardly express their gender. As an ally, I have found it is easy for me to assume that students will feel that they can disclose their gender identity to me because I have been vocal about my identity as an ally. However, as Michael demonstrated, "no matter how welcoming an environment is, there's still that fear" (Interview, 11/17/2020) to disclose one's gender identity. As such, I have realized that because I aspire to allyship, I tend to assume students' gender identity because I presume students feel they can safely disclose their identity. In reality, minoritized individuals may never feel safe in a group of individuals who do

not share their same identity. As such, conductors should remember that students may not disclose their gender, and as a result, conductors must consider if their practices would differ if a trans or gender-expansive student disclosed their identity. If the conductor would respond differently, then the actions the conductor currently employs may be among the barriers that keep trans and gender-expansive signers out of the choirs.

Policies and Practices

As the conductors considered inclusion in choral ensembles, participants considered the policies and practices that contribute and detract from the desire to have a gender-inclusive environment. Although many of the students stated that they found the women's and men's choirs to be internally inclusive, many students, as well as Megan and Chris, expressed concerns about the external image of the ensemble—including name, ensemble classification, and uniforms—could give the perception that the ensembles were not inclusive of a variety of gender identities. Palkki (2016) spoke to the important role that policies have in shaping the environment of an ensemble and whether trans and gender-expansive singers feel safe, welcome, and included. Below, I will talk about uniforms, language, program logistics, ensemble hierarchy, and membership policies.

Uniforms

When Megan was first hired at her university, the women's choir uniform consisted of black dresses and pearls. Megan acknowledged the gender implications of such a uniform, but her reasons for changing the uniform to concert black were more logistical. Because college students are often on a tight budget, she decided she would rather students invest in clothes they would wear outside of the class, such as a blazer for a job interview. Megan's decision about uniforms is an example of the intersectional nature of identity and the need to interrogate gender

norms and assumptions as they related to a variety of identities, such as class and culture (hooks, 2000; Crenshaw, 1991).

The men's choir at DSU has a longstanding tradition of wearing tuxedos for all of their performances. Both Chris and the singers believed that the uniforms could be a barrier for entry, and Chris said that while the singers looked "sharp," the uniform "screams hetero male" (Interview, 4/4/2021). Although Chris said he was open to changing the uniform, the students were less eager about the prospect of a change, making connections to tradition, alumni and community pushback, and the community building that came from things like tying bow ties. The uniforms are another example of something the students and Chris acknowledged as not being inclusive, but the students felt the uniforms were not inherently exclusive, noting that no participants had complained to the conductor or the board about the uniform selection.

Although students may not have openly complained, it is important to remember that there are a number of reasons that students may not feel comfortable bringing up concerns about things like uniforms. As Michael shared, although he felt Megan fostered an environment in which he would be accepted and embraced as a trans man in a women's choir, his fear of his parents finding out he was trans far outweighed his desire to disclose his gender identity with his peers. Experiences like Michael's are an important reminder that teachers must interrogate barriers and inclusive practices at all times, and not simply when someone lodges a complaint.

Chris felt that of all the changes that came with creating more inclusive ensembles, the more symbolic aspects, such as the uniform, would be among the most difficult to change and for singers and community to let go because of sentimental attachment. The uniforms, particularly the cisgender assumption of tuxedos, are another example of an ensemble having inclusive elements within the ensemble while potentially projecting a gender-exclusive environment

because of the masculine assumptions that go along with tuxedos. Because gender expression can be an integral part of an individual's gender identity (Palkki, 2016), conductors must acknowledge the gendered nature of uniforms and consider if the uniform options for a given ensemble allow students to express their gender most fully.

(Adjusting) Language

Both Megan and Chris adjusted their language over the years to be more gender-inclusive, particularly in the form of moving toward gender-neutral terminology. Although Megan never used terms like “ladies” or “girls,” which Megan and the students believed were condescending, Megan was thoughtful in her desire to move toward more gender-neutral terminology, such as “singers,” “sopranos and altos,” and “musicians.” Chris’s journey echoed Megan’s trajectory. Although he never addressed the men’s choir in stereotypically masculine, “rah-rah” ways typically associated with men’s choirs, he also made concerted efforts to move toward gender-neutral terminology as he addressed the singers. By utilizing gender-inclusive language, teachers are creating an environment that centers on the students, does not make assumptions about students’ gender identities, and contributes to a place where students are safer to express and disclose their gender identity (Palkki, 2016, 2017). Other language adjustments went beyond rehearsal language and included ensemble name and classification, which I will discuss in more detail in the next section.

Program Logistics

A number of factors contribute to the overall make-up of a given program—enrollment numbers, the types of choirs offered, the number of choral ensemble conductors in a department, etc. Singers also enroll in certain choirs for a variety of reasons, such as auditions, what their schedule allows, and which choir the students can afford to sing in. In this section, I will discuss

how ensemble hierarchy, membership policies and practices, ensemble make-up, and ensemble classification impact the logistics of a given choir program and the policies and practices therein.

Ensemble Hierarchy

Choir programs are typically tiered according to an audition process, with mixed ensembles being the top ensemble and women's, treble, men's, and tenor-bass choirs being at the bottom of a choir program's ensemble hierarchy (O'Toole, 1998). Because of this, singers in the lower ensembles can feel like their experiences are lower quality, both musically and socially, than those of the mixed ensembles. This is especially true in women's and treble ensembles, which singers often see as a place to put women, sopranos, and altos who were not selected for the top-tier choral ensemble (Gauthier, 2005; O'Toole, 1998; Wilson, 2010, 2012, 2013). For example, Michael, a trans man singing in the LU Women's Choir, preferred singing in a mixed choir because, in his experience, those ensembles were "more academic," "very focused... on the music," and overall a more rigorous musical experience. Although the attitudes within the LU women's choir have slowly begun to change, Megan found that the members of the women's choir traditionally felt as if they were the "leftovers" of the choir program and believed that this viewpoint was carried over from high school choral experiences (Major, 2017). Gauthier (2005), Wilson (2010, 2012, 2013), and O'Toole (1998) highlighted a longstanding history of women's choirs being approached from a deficit mindset where both singers and conductors view the ensemble as lesser than, resulting in lower morale and community within the ensemble.

At DSU, Chris believed the singers of the men's choir specifically chose to sing in the men's choir because they were drawn to the literature of men's and tenor-bass ensembles and were eager to have the community of "masculine identifying" (Artifact, 4/20/2021) individuals. Although women's and men's choirs have traditionally been classified and separated by gender,

Chris came from a choral tradition that used gendered ensembles as a place for building skills in a choir of singers with similar voice types (such as tenors and basses in a men's or tenor-bass ensemble), which made vocal instruction more streamlined based on voice type. Chris acknowledged the complication of choral hierarchies being directly linked to gender and asked himself, "How do we organize our institutions... with integrity yet also honor... inclusivity?" (Interview, 3/4/2021). I will continue to address Chris's question throughout this chapter.

Because of the historically gendered practices related to choir, singers who wish to sing in a mixed ensemble but are not selected for membership are often "pigeonholed" (Interview, 11/17/2021) into singing in traditionally single-gender ensembles. For trans and gender-expansive singers, being forced to sing in a gendered ensemble can be challenging because it may not align with their voice type, or the perspectives of the music may center on gendered experiences that do not align with their own (such as a trans man singing about women's empowerment in a women's or treble choir), further complicating the implications of ensemble hierarchies. Some programs, such as the ones where Megan obtained her undergraduate and master's degrees, only have mixed ensembles, but for programs with women's, treble, men's, and/or tenor-bass ensembles, conductors must interrogate the implications of the gendered nature of the choirs, particularly with how they relate to singers' feelings of self-worth.

Membership Policies and Practices: Gender or Voice Type?

Because women's, treble, men's, and tenor-bass ensembles have traditionally been classified by gender, ensemble membership policies have traditionally been connected to gender. In both the LU women's and DSU men's choirs, students and conductors voiced concerns about membership policies rooted in gender could be exclusive to trans and gender-expansive students. As Megan and the singers of the LU women's choir considered moving away from a gendered

model for their ensemble, they considered whether membership should be based on gender (women, trans, and gender-expansive singers) or voice type (anyone who sings soprano or alto). Membership policies focused on gender would allow for trans women who sing bass to sing in the ensemble, even though the literature of the choir has traditionally focused on soprano and alto voice types. Megan was open to selecting music that wasn't explicitly for women's and treble choirs, as well as adjusting treble choir music to meet the needs of singers who do not sing soprano or alto.

As Megan and the students considered membership policies based on voice type, they also considered how including cisgender men in a treble ensemble would impact the environment of the ensemble. Some singers expressed that they were uncomfortable with the idea of cisgender men singing in the ensemble, either because they felt they couldn't speak freely around men because of trauma and abuse they may have previously experienced from cisgender men. Other singers felt that excluding cisgender men was "a little mean and working against inclusion" (Anonymous Survey, 11/16/2020).

When Chris reflected on the potential of cisgender women singing in a men's or tenor-bass ensemble and cisgender men singing in a women's or treble ensemble, he said his thoughts were "unformulated," referring to the complex implications of moving away from a gendered choral ensemble model. In my personal experience, I have known cisgender men that were members of women's and treble ensembles, but I do not know any cisgender women who were members of a men's or tenor-bass ensemble. I have heard arguments for cisgender men singing soprano and alto as an opportunity for cisgender men to develop their head voice and falsetto. I have also heard arguments against cisgender women singing tenor or bass out of concern for their vocal health, implying that cisgender women cannot physically sing tenor or bass without

harming themselves, despite the fact that contraltos can typically sing an F below middle C or, in some cases, more than two octaves below middle C (McKinney, 1994). Although a number of ensembles traditionally classified as men's ensembles now accept singers of all gender identities (Feibel & Cui, 2018; McCafferty, 2018), these ensembles continue to be classified explicitly by voice type (in the case of the Whiffenpoofs and the Harvard Glee Club, tenor-bass ensembles). Although gender and voice type have historically been treated as interrelated, Palkki (2016) and Sauerland (2018) demonstrated that trans and gender-expansive singers may defy expectations related to gender and voice type. For conductors who continue to classify ensembles by gender, they must consider how they would approach, for example, a trans woman who sings tenor or bass in a women's ensemble, which traditionally sings repertoire geared toward sopranos and altos.

Voice Building

Both Megan and Chris participated in women's and men's choirs as students. Although Megan had limited experience singing in and working with women's choirs until her current position, Chris went to an undergraduate program and taught in a public school that emphasized men's and women's choirs as a place for voice building and preparation for more advanced ensembles down the road. Carp (2004) found conductors shared similar views, though the conductors' rationales were often related to behavior and social reasons rather than musical ones. One conductor said that "beginning students are very self-conscious and unwilling to do things that they perceive make them look foolish" (p. 30), and as a result, dividing choirs by gender allows students to feel more comfortable. Another conductor said that boys new to choir make more vocal progress when female peers are not present because "it takes the pressure off singing in front of the opposite sex" (p. 29). Conductors also noted that female students tend to "work

harder w/o having the boys watch and listen to them when they are trying to concentrate” (p. 30). Statements such as the ones previously quoted are a direct reflection of heteronormative expectations based on societal assumptions about what is masculine and thus valued. Although most research about the benefits of gendered ensembles focuses on middle and high school choirs, it appears that musical rationales for separating beginning choirs by gender for voice-building reasons continue at the collegiate level, as evidenced by choir programs throughout the country.

Communication

Communication became a central aspect of Megan, Chris, and their students’ exploration of gender inclusivity in traditionally single-gender ensembles. I will discuss two separate subthemes: creating open communication and facilitating and participating in difficult conversations. Communication was consistently an area that the participants both appreciated throughout the process and struggled with as they strived to move forward in a way that was both inclusive to a variety of gender identities while also preserving the elements of the ensemble that they valued the most.

Open(ing) Communication

Student Agency and Input

Megan and Chris generated opportunities for students to give their input within the ensemble. In valuing students’ opinions, perspectives, and experiences, they made room for students to have agency within the ensemble and centered the needs, goals, and desires of trans and gender-expansive students. For example, both Megan and Chris talked about trans women and men who wanted to join women’s and men’s choirs, respectively, even though their voice parts did not necessarily align with the repertoire traditionally sung in those ensembles.

When considering changing the name and classification of the women's choir at LU, the director of choral activities empowered her to make whatever decision she felt would be best for the students. Although Megan could have made an executive decision, she chose to dialogue with students, listen to their thoughts and concerns, and use their perspectives to help shape the immediate future of the ensemble. The students also helped craft the new name, ensemble bio, and course description. For Megan, it was essential to include them in the process so she could make the most informed decision possible, and she saw dialoguing with students as essential to make sure the students didn't feel in the dark about the decision and that they could specifically articulate the reasons for the change and be stewards of the ensemble.

At DSU, Chris felt that the men's choir was the students' choir and that he was there to influence it through literature selection, policy, and the tone he set, acknowledging the role he had to play in establishing an inclusive community and environment. He also embraced the fact that the choir was both a class and a student organization and worked collaboratively with the student board to ensure that their voices and wishes were heard and executed. Chris believed that the move away from being a men's choir was imminent in the coming years. There were already conversations happening at the administrative level at his university to set up a framework to discuss the gendered nature of the ensemble and to allow students and alumni to be a part of the decision. Like Megan, Chris believed that giving students and alumni a platform to have their voices heard would lead to the most meaningful outcomes.

Because of the place that schools have in society, they play a vital role in “educat[ing] students about politics, social history, [and] foster[ing] critical thinking” (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017, p. 203). Although some may claim that politics do not belong in schools, schools have long been at the center of politics, as evidenced by Supreme Court cases such as *Brown v. Board*

of Education. Given the complex nature of gender in society, empowering students to discuss social issues is a vital part of teaching students to “engage in social justice activism” (p. 203). For conductors seeking to create inclusive choral ensembles, prioritizing student agency and input shows the students how much they are valued and that their experiences and perspectives matter.

Leading by Example

One of the ways that Megan and Chris were able to open communication within their ensembles was leading by example. As Megan worked with the women’s choir students on the complexity of gender in choir, some students specifically highlighted that they appreciated her dedication to social justice and that by knowing it was important to her, they felt more comfortable talking about it. Although Megan initially hesitated to share her perspective, she shared her thoughts and feelings about gender inclusion in choir because the students expressed that they wanted to know where she stood on the issues. Because the women’s choir students acknowledged the complex nature of gender inclusion in ensembles typically defined by gender exclusion, they appreciated that Megan did not claim to have any individual answer or solution, which made the students more willing to work through any apprehension or confusion they had on their end. Megan planned on sharing the project she did with the LU women’s choir with her future choirs as a way to show that she was dedicated to inclusion in choral ensembles and that she was open and eager to continue social justice conversations in her choirs.

The singers of the men’s choir noted Chris’s dedication to leading by example, particularly within relation to vulnerability. As I interviewed three cisgender men in the DSU men’s choir, each of them voiced that open communication and vulnerability were uncommon experiences for them as men. Daniel, a singer in the men’s choir, shared his personal struggles

with mental health and Chris's willingness to sit down with him individually and share his own experiences. Because things such as mental health are often taboo topics for men in the United States (Chatmon, 2020), Chris's example of open communication made the singers more comfortable to discuss challenging topics.

Megan and Chris each had previous choral conductors that they felt were models for teaching by example, particularly with relation to inclusion. Particularly with relation to trans and gender-expansive signers, Megan and Chris both practiced what they preached with inclusion, with Chris's philosophy centering on the central question of, "how do we care well for each student?" (Chris Interview #1) Each of the conductors were firm believers in centering trans and gender-expansive perspectives and experiences in discussions of inclusion, which translated to their students considering how they could best create environments that were inclusive of a variety of gender identities.

In studying LGBT musicians, Palkki (2016), Sauerland (2018), and Thomas-Durrell (2019) each stressed the vital role that music educators play in the lives of minoritized students. Although Silveira and Goff (2016) suggested that music teachers tend toward supporting trans students, high school participants in Palkki and Caldwell's (2018) survey found that teachers who voiced support for LGBTQ students were a small majority, meaning that many LGBTQ students may not find allies in their music teachers and that many students do not have active examples of allyship in their classrooms. For LGBTQIA+ students who do not see educators discussing LGBTQIA+ issues in the classroom, they likely will not feel welcome, accepted, or safe in their music programs. The perspectives of minoritized students stress the need for music educators to lead by example in order to foster a communicative environment for students.

Difficult Conversations

Given the complex nature of gender in choral ensembles, particularly in traditionally single-gender choral ensembles, the conductors and students voiced that the conversations surrounding inclusion were difficult while simultaneously highlighting the value and importance of having said difficult conversations. Given the variety of perspectives and experiences within the ensembles, the conversations surrounding inclusion were difficult for different reasons. Below, I will highlight some of the aspects of difficult conversations throughout this project and how Megan, Chris, and the students came to approach those conversations.

For Megan, she sought to program music that lent itself to having difficult conversations. Her rationale for having difficult conversations was multifaceted. First, Megan prioritized having difficult conversations that focused on issues that were important to her, such as women's issues and feminism. "Let's talk," she said, "Let's have some conversations, and let's program with the idea of discussions in mind" (Interview, 11/10/2020). Many of the students stated that they also appreciated the conversations they had surrounding issues that were important to them, such as intersectional issues, and that they felt they were conversations they did not get to have in places outside of the women's choir. As Megan and the singers worked through their inclusion project, students noted that having difficult conversations led to actionable change, rather than theorizing without creating change, and that it led to more meaningful music-making with even deeper and personal connections to the music. Students were grateful to have the chance to talk through these issues, with some students even expressing frustration that they had not had the chance to discuss gender issues in choirs previously. LGBTQIA+ students were grateful that privileged individuals in the ensemble were the ones bringing up inclusion, rather than putting the onus on minoritized individuals to initiate discussions and advocate for their rights.

Chris and the men's choir students repeated many of the sentiments that were shared by Megan and the women's choir students. Chris specifically programmed music that allowed for deeper conversations about gender, race, and other social justice issues, which has been an essential element of the ensemble in the most recent years. Chris also partnered with local organizations for fundraising efforts and brought in different organizations from the university and community to engage with the men's choir. Students like Daniel, who care deeply about social justice issues, appreciated having a chance to examine their privilege through repertoire and the space of the men's choir and consider how they could be better allies to minoritized communities. For students who are minoritized, prioritizing diversity, equity, and inclusion are essential elements to creating inclusive environments. When choirs prioritize diversifying and centering underrepresented narratives in music education, students who are minoritized are more likely to feel a sense of community and belonging within the ensemble.

Moving forward, Chris believed that the men's choir would restructure and become a tenor-bass ensemble, and he saw that as essential in order for the ensemble to meet their DEI goals. In talking with the students, it became clear that students wanted to be inclusive of a variety of gender identities but were hesitant to embrace moving away from being a men's choir. By the end of the data collection, the DSU women's choir determined that they would become a treble ensemble, making the decision of ensemble classification and membership policies all the more vital in the immediate future. Chris, the music department, community, and current and former members of the men's choir will have many difficult conversations awaiting them as they consider the best way to move forward with gender inclusion.

LGBTQIA+ topics continue to not be present and forward in music education, particularly in practitioner journals (Freer, 2013). Teachers may "shy away from 'hard

conversations' about race, class, gender, privilege, and sexuality that inform teacher philosophy and identity" (Thomas-Durrell, 2019, p. 51), and in turn, enforce the "silences and invisibility" (Ferfolja, 2007) of minoritized identities. Although it can be challenging and sensitive to engage in topics surrounding identity, scholars highlight the importance of including and discussing LGBTQIA+ issues in education (Garrett, 2012; Palkki, 2015; Paparo & Sweet, 2014; Taylor, 2011).

Although cisgender students may find women's and men's spaces as a place for having difficult discussions, trans and gender-expansive students who are not cisgender may find that discussing issues related to gender in women's and men's spaces more difficult, especially if their "position doesn't align" (Interview 11/17/2020) with the gender issue at hand. Feminist scholars of color such as hooks (2000), Mohanty (2003), and Radford-Hill (2000) cautioned against approaches that presumed the identities of all parties and gave examples of how feminists, who are often led by white, middle-class women, can (in)advertently center the needs and experiences of white, middle-class women. Crenshaw (1991) advocated for an intersectional approach to discussions related to oppression to provide a more nuanced approach to how identities such as race, ethnicity, nationality, sexuality, religion, citizenship, and gender impact individual experience. When discussing topics related to identity, educators must be cognizant of the way discussions are presented and ensure that they do not center explicitly on one identity, thereby alienating those who do not align with that identity.

Strategies

In considering and talking about difficult topics such as gender inclusion in traditionally single-gender ensembles, Megan and the women's choir students engaged in a variety of strategies, including some guidelines and sentence stems. For example, students used phrases

like “I believe,” “I would like to amplify,” and “yes, and” (rather than “yes, but...”) as sentence stems to engage in dialogue. They also used strategies outlined by Teaching Tolerance (now known as “Learning for Justice”), including being vulnerable, finding comfort in discomfort, and reiterating what another person has said before responding to ensure that the other person feels heard and that their point is understood (Learning for Justice, n.d.). Throughout the process, students revisited the challenges of difficult conversations, particularly when they are impassioned about the topic. In reflecting on the process, students stressed the importance of gaining consent to engage in conversations, being patient and open-minded, listening to listen rather than listening to respond.

Throughout the project, Megan and the students felt one of the most valuable aspects of the process was the ability to share written comments in an anonymous forum. For students who felt their opinions were not shared by the majority of the group—such as students who had “a hard time getting on board” with trans and gender-expansive inclusion in women’s choirs or trans and gender-expansive students who did not feel comfortable or safe disclosing their identity to the ensemble—written commentary was a way for students to engage and feel like their voice was at least being heard by Megan, even if the choir chose to go in a different direction. As a conductor, Megan appreciated the written comments as a way to filter comments that were either intentionally or unintentionally transphobic so trans and gender-expansive students were not alienated by the discussions.

In the men’s choir, Chris made many organizational decisions in conjunction with the choir’s executive student board. As the choir sought to unpack its history of racism, sexism, homophobia, xenophobia, and transphobia, the board added a DEI team made up of multiple choir members to specifically address diversity, equity, and inclusion within the ensemble. The

DEI positions on the student board did things such as bringing in minoritized artists, coordinating with local organizations aligned with the choir's DEI ideals, and holding the board accountable for engaging in DEI-focused events and actions. As the national conversation surrounding gendered ensembles continues to evolve, the DEI positions for both the DSU women's and men's choirs will be actively involved in any policy changes made at the choir, program, and school levels.

Complicated Feelings

Megan, Chris, and the students of the women's and men's choirs in this dissertation had nuanced and complex views of inclusion in traditionally single-gender ensembles. Many of the participants expressly wanted to create spaces that were inclusive to a variety of gender identities, and most of those people felt that the simplest way to have gender-inclusive environments was to get rid of gender classification within the choral ensembles and become treble and tenor-bass choirs. However, many of the participants said the aspect of the women's and men's choirs that they valued most was the single-gender nature of the ensembles and the benefits that came from that. As one member of the women's choir shared, "I'm all for inclusion, but I also feel passionate about spaces for women" (Anonymous Survey, 11/06/2020).

As the students in both choirs dialogued with the conductors, their peers, and myself, a number of complicated questions arose that left students questioning their previously held beliefs. As one student pointed out, "there are so many good and different ideas, and I'm still trying to sort through my feelings" (Group Discussion, 11/30/2020). Initially, Megan also had complex and conflicting feelings about potentially moving away from a women's choir model, but after much reflection, she felt that the choir could continue to focus on women's issues while

expanding the conversation to include and center on other perspectives, as well, such as trans, gender-expansive, and BIPOC individuals.

In both ensembles, many of the complicated feelings were directly tied to individual and group sentiment related to traditions and discourses found within the ensembles. For example, Chris believed the singers of the men's choir knew that tuxedos were not gender-inclusive, all while acknowledging that many of the students would struggle to let go of the uniform for reasons ranging from the camaraderie of learning to tie a bow tie to the marketing and recruitment strategies based on the visual of a group of singers in a single upscale uniform. Although it appears there are trends toward more gender-inclusive policies and discourses in music education (McBride & Palkki, 2020), choral methods texts have long relied on embracing the gendered aspects of choral ensembles as a way to recruit and retain male singers (Koza, 1993-1994). Gendered discourses in choral ensembles inevitably contribute to an environment rooted in tradition and sentiment—for better and for worse.

Megan and the women's choir appeared to embrace a framework related to transgender theory, where scholars advocate for moving away from “either/or” thinking (such as male or female) and toward thought processes that consider the “both/neither” approach that embraces growth and change across time (Roen, 2001, 2002). Chris appeared to embrace a similar approach while acknowledging that the singers were continuing to formulate their thoughts on the gendered nature of the ensemble and what moving away from a men's choir model could mean for the future of the ensemble. Scholars like Palkki (2016) acknowledge that there is no one approach or answer that will work for all ensembles and that singers can have powerful and positive experiences in gendered ensembles (Bartolome, 2013; Elorriaga, 2011; Freer, 2009a, 2009b; Parker, 2018; Ramsey, 2013; Sweet, 2010). At the same time, trans and gender-expansive

singers may have experiences that do not mirror those of their cisgender peers (Palkki, 2016). These conflicting experiences stress the need for conductors to communicate with their students to determine potential barriers for inclusion and directly address factors that may detract from inclusive choral ensembles.

Not Knowing the Answer. One of the greatest challenges the singers faced with regard to engaging in challenging and difficult conversations was their concern that there was not a simple answer, or that if there was an answer, the singers did not know what it was and thus didn't know where to start. One student said that they enjoyed the discussions but rarely contributed because they had so many unsorted and unformed thoughts and did not know how to contribute. At one point, Megan shared that she at times did not know how to best approach change in the women's choir because she was afraid of "messing up" or doing wrong by the students.

Utilizing and critical social justice framework, Sensoy and DiAngelo (2017) unpacked inaction, particularly by members of a privileged group. Although feeling overwhelmed or guilt-ridden is a normal part of realizing one's privilege, they stressed the importance that "feelings only be temporary and don't become an excuse to avoid action" as these feelings are "rooted in privilege and function to legitimize inaction on equity" (p. 213). The singers came to a similar realization as they considered equity in their ensemble and prioritized actionable outcomes as a result of their challenging discussions. They felt that there was no perfect or correct answer for all choirs, and the decisions they made on the basis of inclusion would, could, and likely should evolve and change over time based on the needs of the ensemble.

Different Opinions. As Megan and the women's choir students worked through their project, one of the initial reactions and reflections that came from the students was that they were

surprised that there were so many different opinions were so varied within the ensemble. “I assumed we were all on the same page,” shared one student,” and we are far from that at the moment” (Anonymous Survey, 11/16/2020). For Megan, knowing that the students had varied opinions helped frame her mindset going into the project and determining the best place to start with the singers. Some students were uncomfortable because of the differing opinions. “It can be unsettling to feel any tension arise from those differences” (Anonymous Survey, 11/16/2020).

As Chris considered the future of the DSU men’s choir, he felt that in order for the choir to be inclusive of a variety of gender identities, it was essential for the choir to move away from a gendered model. Although the students did not appear to reject the notion of moving away from a gendered ensemble model, they did say they wanted to explore the various options and see if there was a way to stay a men’s choir while still being inclusive to trans and gender-expansive students. Chris said he was open to changing the uniform of the choir to be more gender-inclusive, while acknowledging that many of the students, alumni, and community members value the uniform and the history and community that come with the tuxedos. Because Chris intended to engage with students, community, alumni, and the school of music, he saw knowing the various opinions as essential so he could frame future discussions and conversations with those perspectives in mind.

Listening to and Learning from Other Perspectives

While the students were considering inclusion in traditionally single-gender ensembles, I noticed that a number of students changed, altered, or solidified their perspectives and actions after hearing new and different perspectives from their peers. For example, when a trans or gender-expansive student anonymously shared that students were speaking hypothetically about trans and gender-expansive students despite the fact that there already were trans and gender-

expansive singers in the ensemble, many of the students stopped centering discussions specifically on women's perspectives and experiences. Previously, many students had assumed that all of the people in the choir were women, only to learn that was not the case. Because many of the students previously stated they found value in a shared experience as women, many of the students began to reframe their perspectives on the ensemble as they considered how to be gender inclusive in their choir.

When reflecting on their pedagogy, Megan and Chris both spoke to the importance of listening to their trans and gender-expansive students and allowing them to lead the way with their educational, social, and musical experiences. Through their interactions with trans and gender-expansive students, they altered their pedagogy and the discourses within their ensembles. Chris also noted that his personal philosophy and approach to working with trans students was directly impacted by watching a mentor change his teaching approach to be more inclusive and welcoming to a trans student in the choir.

When members of the dominant group believe that their experiences are similar to those in the minoritized group (e.g., cisgender singers assuming that trans and gender-expansive singers would be empowered, welcomed, and validated in women's and men's choirs), they can "impose [their] reality on them" and "prevent [themselves] from learning more about their perspectives," and in turn, "invalidate the oppression" (Sensoy & DiAngelo, p. 206) that minoritized populations experience. By creating spaces in which individuals can come to understand their privilege and the different opinions that exist within a group, members of the dominant group can learn to reject binary thinking, come to understand the experiences of those whose perspectives differ from their own, and challenge oppression within social groups.

Conductors must prioritize creating spaces in which singers can safely discuss their differences in order to have more diverse and equitable ensembles.

Problematic Views

In the anonymous surveys, a small number of students made comments that were “a rub against inclusion” (Interview, 3/15/2021). Megan and I chose to not share the openly transphobic comments with the students out of concern for students with minoritized gender identities, but a few students said some of the comments could be interpreted to be transphobic, and as a result, the trans and gender-expansive students questioned whether the choir was a safe space for them. One of the students with problematic viewpoints felt they could not share their viewpoints because they were not aligned with the main opinions of the group. Megan responded by saying, “Megan, not Professor Harris, doesn’t care. But Professor Harris, conductor of all singers in this group, doesn’t want them to sign out and stop contributing,” going on to clarify that she “want[ed] them to change their opinion” so that all the students could “feel heard... welcome... [and] share who they are” (Interview, 11/30/2020).

For individuals who feel that others may be oversensitive or hyper-focused on political correctness, Sensoy and DiAngelo (2017) called for individuals who are part of the dominant group to first “recognize that the burden of understanding should rest with the dominant group,” and come to “understand the collective weight of oppression” (p. 210) that microaggressions have on minoritized populations. Framing minoritized individuals’ experiences as being “blown out of proportion” both prioritizes the perspectives of privileged individuals while simultaneously belittling the experiences of those whose positionality differs from their own. Sensoy and DiAngelo suggested that the best way to approach mindsets focused on others’

perspectives is to reframe the mindset as one focused on learning about what one's own understanding is lacking.

Megan and I struggled to find a balance between having students engage in discussions while ensuring that all minoritized students felt safe in the ensemble. Because Megan wanted to create a space where the students could learn, she was “open to hearing” problematic opinions and “want[ed] to know where my students fall” (Megan Interview #6). She felt the best way to do that was through written responses and thought those students might “[feel] heard just by being able to say their opinions” (Megan Interview #6). This approach allowed Megan to come to understand the views of all students without placing the burden of listening to, problematizing, and confronting problematic views on minoritized individuals.

Allyship

As Megan, Chris, and the women's and men's choir students considered gender inclusion in traditionally single-gender ensembles, participants spent time reflecting on allyship and what it meant to be an ally to trans and gender-expansive students. In this section, I will discuss privilege, inclusion/exclusion, trans and gender-expansive students, modeling and being explicit about allyship, and actionable change as a result of seeking allyship.

Privilege

Many of the participants in the study presented and identified as cisgender individuals. As such, when considering trans and gender-expansive students in traditionally gendered ensembles, most of the students in the choir approached the project from a privileged standpoint. When I originally presented the project to Megan and the women's choir students, many singers commented on how they had not considered the pervasiveness of gender issues in choral programs as a whole, with one student saying, “I just wasn't affected by it, and I just didn't

notice” (Anonymous Survey, 11/16/2020). Because music education often privileges cisheteronormative perspectives (Bergonzi, 2009; Palkki, 2015), it stands to reason that singers from privileged perspectives may never have considered the impact gender has in choral contexts, even within gendered ensembles.

Chris and the men’s choir students were well aware of the privilege that came with a men’s space, particularly one that had a history of classism, racism, homophobia, xenophobia, sexism, and transphobia. They reflected on their relationship with the university’s women’s choir and that in the past, the men’s choir and its members had a “superiority complex” (Interview, 4/4/2021) and held themselves to different standards than they expected from their peers in the women’s choir. One student saw the men’s choir as a place for him to learn about his privilege and how he could use his position in society to support minoritized people.

At one point, Megan reflected that work as an ally often centered the person seeking to be an ally, rather than the minoritized individual, focusing on “how can I feel better?”, rather than “how can I center the needs and priorities of people less privileged than I am?” (Interview, 3/15/2021). In seeking to center minoritized individuals, Megan came to the conclusion that it should be minoritized individuals, and not privileged ones, who have the final say on whether or not a person is an ally.

Members of the dominant group in a society—such as cisgender and heterosexual individuals—often move through life seeing themselves as individuals and can struggle to even identify to which group they belong because they have never had to identify within any individual group (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). Coming to recognize one’s privilege and the groups in which one resides is an essential step toward being an ally. Sensoy and DiAngelo stress that “knowing the privileges and limitations afforded by your group positions is the most

powerful first step in evaluating how you might act” (p. 214) in a given community. For Megan, Chris, and the singers, coming to know their privilege, particularly related to their gender, was an essential step toward creating actionable outcomes toward more inclusive choral ensembles.

Inclusion/Exclusion

Centering Trans and Gender-Expansive Perspectives

The impetus of this dissertation was to understand how choir conductors address inclusion and exclusion in women’s and men’s choirs. Megan, Chris, and the students of the women’s and men’s choirs had inclusion efforts at the forefront of their minds as they considered their roles as allies to trans and gender-expansive singers. Because many of the singers believed the choirs were gender-inclusive, they were troubled at the prospect of gendered choirs creating barriers for trans and gender-expansive people or creating environments that were not welcome to a variety of gender identities. Especially after hearing trans students’ perspectives, Megan, Chris, and a number of students saw the labels of “women” and “men” in the choirs’ titles and were concerned that the gendered nature of the ensemble could imply that the spaces excluded singers who were not cisgender.

I was only able to interview one trans singer in the project, and he stressed that while it is important to have conversations surrounding social justice issues, trans singers’ “first priority... is just to find a space where we’re comfortable,” (Interview, 11/17/202) and environments that center exclusively on cisgender perspectives make it difficult for a space to be inclusive for singers whose “position doesn’t align with that” (Interview, 11/17/2020). After coming to know a variety of trans and gender-expansive students, both Megan and Chris felt that the gendered names of the ensembles worked against their DEI goals. When Megan first thought about the future of the women’s choir with regards to its name and membership, she said “I still don’t

know the answer, but I'm pretty sure it's not 'women's choir'" (Interview, 11/30/2020). For Megan, representing trans and gender-expansive singers in the name, mission, and description of the ensemble was a necessary step toward ensuring that trans and gender-expansive students felt that they were welcome and belonged in the ensemble.

Although identities beyond trans identities were mentioned throughout the project, I feel identities such as nonbinary, genderqueer, and gender fluid are often forgotten or left out of the discussion. Binary thinking continues to be pervasive in discussions about gender. When addressing the benefits of gendered spaces, participants discussed how trans women and men may feel validation in gendered spaces, but little discussion was specifically dedicated to people who identify outside of the binary and how gendered systems impact those whose gender identity fluctuates or does not exist as male or female. I will discuss the implications of underrepresented genders in choral ensembles and suggestions for research in Chapter 9.

Modeling Actionable Allyship

As educators, Megan and Chris learned a lot about being better allies to trans and gender-expansive students directly from their interactions with students of a variety of gender identities. In Bartolome's (2016) study, she noted how she had always considered herself an ally but was unaware of the necessary steps she could take to create gender-inclusive environments until she worked with a trans student. Chris specifically spoke to the "beautiful model" (Interview, 11/9/2020) he found in his previous mentors as they sought to display allyship in their own leadership. Both Megan and Chris sought to create gender-inclusive environments by modeling the type of attitudes and actions that would contribute to safe spaces for trans and gender-expansive students, such as using gender-neutral language, updating policies and practices to be

gender-inclusive, and selecting repertoire that did not play into traditionally sexist narratives often associated with women's and men's choir music.

Both Megan and Chris had moments throughout the project where they realized the importance of not only having gender-inclusive policies and practices, but also explicitly stating that they were allies to members of the ensemble. They also determined that a necessary part of creating a gender-inclusive environment was checking in with trans and gender-expansive students to ensure that they were being the best allies they could be. In one anonymous survey, a trans student asked for clarification on whether Megan and I saw ourselves as allies to the LGBTQIA+ community. Although Megan thought her actions reflected that she was an ally—"why else would someone do this project if they weren't an ally?" (Interview, 11/17/2020)—she realized that the most guaranteed way to have students know you are an ally is to explicitly state it.

Over the course of this study, Chris realized the importance of being an active ally to trans and gender-expansive students. Of the three students that I interviewed individually, each of them stated that the choir had never had a trans or gender-expansive student, even though the choir currently had one trans singer. When I shared that with Chris, he realized that the singers would not know there was a trans singer unless the trans singer chose to disclose his gender identity with the ensemble. After that realization, Chris voiced that he intended to be more diligent about checking in with his trans and gender-expansive students to make sure their needs were being met within the ensemble and that Chris was fostering an environment centered on inclusivity and belonging.

The women's and men's choir students said they were able to come to know Megan and Chris's values based on the repertoire they selected and the conversations they had in the

ensembles. Students in each ensemble noted that the conductors used gender-neutral language and saw that as an effort to be more gender-inclusive. As Megan and the women's choir explored inclusivity in their choir, the singers said they appreciated that Megan was dedicated to making changes to make the space more inclusive, with one student noting that she even added a major in women, sexuality, and gender as a result of Megan modeling actionable allyship. The men's choir students also appreciated the way that Chris engaged the choir with organizations that had social justice efforts in mind and that those experiences helped the students work toward being better allies.

Teachers play a considerable role in creating an environment centered on diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging. Palkki (2016) stressed the ways in which teachers can influence policies at their schools, such as uniforms and rooming assignments, as well as outside of their schools, such as the inclusion of a variety of gender identities in state honor choirs. Music teachers can be a powerful force in the lives of minoritized students and act as mentors and advocates within and outside of their classrooms (Palkki, 2016; Taylor, 2018; Thomas-Durrell, 2019). Given the extent of the time that music teachers spend with their students, "the relationship between music teacher and student lends itself to more opportunity for music teachers to provide students' mentorship and support," (Thomas-Durrell, 2019, p. 172), particularly in the form of explicit allyship.

Megan, Chris, and the singers all saw actionable outcomes as an essential part of allyship. The women's choir students appreciated that they were able to be a part of the process of changing the name, ensemble biography, and course description, rather than having it take place behind closed doors. Megan hoped that by being a part of the process, students would be able to take their experiences and apply them to other areas of their life as they sought to be better allies.

One student was well aware of the greater discourse surrounding inclusivity in gendered ensembles and felt that their choir was at the forefront of change in the greater choral community. “It feels so cool to be a part of history” (Interview, 2/4/2021). As the students considered moving forward, they wanted to use their experiences to help inform local middle and high school programs of the project and act as a support for schools seeking to create more gender-inclusive environments.

When Chris talked with students about their role as privileged individuals in society, he insisted that their words reflected their work. “We’re not going to say anything we don’t back up with action” (Chris Interview). For the men’s choir, action included adding a DEI committee, programming repertoire that challenged masculine stereotypes and represented composers with diverse identities, collaborating with organizations oriented toward social justice, and changing elements of the ensemble—such as the choir’s constitution and gendered rehearsal language—to make the choir more visibility inclusive.

Because individuals may struggle to move forward when there are no easy answers (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017), Palkki (2016) advocated for choirs and organizations who addressed inclusion in actionable ways to provide their changes as “blueprints of inclusive policies for choral educators, school administrators, and state music organization officials” (p. 297). Although examples of policy changes can be a helpful springboard for inclusive policies, Sensoy and DiAngelo (2017) cautioned that individuals must not seek to be told how to address social justice and that “the desire to jump to the ‘end’ or to the answers can be a way to avoid the hard work of self-reflection and reeducation that is required of us” (p. 213). For choirs considering gender inclusion in their ensembles, I advocate for individuals to follow a similar process as modeled by Megan and the women’s choir students to ensure that individuals are

addressing their privilege, centering diverse perspectives, and properly examining barriers that exist within their own ensembles. By prioritizing a critical social justice approach that interrogates the sources of injustice, teachers and students will be able to cater change based on the specific needs and circumstances of their own ensembles.

Leaving Room For Change

Although Megan, Chris, and the singers made and continued to make changes in their choir to be inclusive, they acknowledged that some of the changes either did not go far enough or missed the mark entirely. For example, in the men’s choir, the constitution used to refer to members as men but now includes the language “any student identifying as male” (Artifact, 4/20/2021). At the time of the change, it was significant to acknowledge that a trans man could join the ensemble, but Chris and the students acknowledged that there was more that could be done to make it explicit that individuals who don’t identify as male—such as those who are agender or genderqueer—would be able to sing in the ensemble. Chris and the singers talked about moving in the direction of making membership related to voice type (i.e., tenor and bass) rather than being exclusively related to gender.

Chris felt there was more action to be done in areas such as the name and gendered classification of the ensemble, the uniform, and other elements of the choir’s outward appearance and marketing that may give trans and gender-expansive students pause about joining the ensemble. Both Megan and Chris stressed that simply changing elements such as the name and the uniform does not explicitly make a space more inclusive. Continued evaluation and action related to inclusivity are necessary to create a space that is open to singers of a variety of gender identities. Ensemble classification is only one part of it. “The name isn’t going to change

everything,” Chris said, “but it’s going to make it better, and that I see as a positive thing.”
(Interview, 4/4/2021)

When Megan and the women’s choir students worked on the project, they often referred to the changes that they were making as “for now” changes. They emphasized that since there didn’t appear to be a perfect or ideal answer to gender inclusion in traditionally single-gender ensembles, they likely were making decisions that may not work in the short- or long term. The decisions they made during the project as well as in the future would also be dependent on the ever-changing membership of the ensemble and the needs and priorities of the singers in the room each semester.

Because ensemble membership typically fluctuates over time, the needs of singers and teachers will also continue to fluctuate. As conductors and singers create more diverse, equitable, and inclusive environments, a more socially diverse group of singers will bring even more perspectives to consider. Having multiple perspectives, however, is meaningless if individuals feel they cannot share their perspectives (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). In order for an ensemble to be equitable and inclusive, conductors must be open to changing policies based on the singers within the ensemble. Conductors must then prioritize an environment centered on open communication that empowers minoritized individuals to share their perspectives and know that conductors and singers will take their needs and suggestions to heart.

Summary

In this chapter, I discussed five themes that emerged from the interviews with Megan, Chris, and the singers of the women’s and men’s choirs. As the participants explored the meaning and purposes of the women’s and men’s choirs, they struggled to determine if the primary purpose of the choir was related to shared experience based on gender or if the

ensembles were centered on treble and tenor-bass repertoire. Those reflections led to the participants problematizing and enforcing a number of stereotypes and assumptions related to gender, such as the perceived value of the ensembles as related to gender. In an effort to prioritize gender inclusion, the participants explored policies and practices within the ensembles, such as choir uniform, rehearsal language, ensemble hierarchy, and membership policies. Because of the varied opinions present within the choirs, it became clear that creating an environment that allowed the students and conductors to openly communicate with one another was essential in order to properly and fully address equitable changes within the choirs. Participants saw actionable change as an essential part of allyship, and sought to create a choral environment that would leave room for growth and change based on the needs of ever-evolving membership and nature of the choral ensembles. The final chapter of this dissertation will discuss the implications for practice and areas of future research.

CHAPTER 9: REFLECTIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND SUGGESTIONS

In this final chapter, I summarize the project and reflect on the research process, including my positionality and perspective throughout the project. I provide implications with regard to inclusive policies in choir programs, both for students and teachers, stress the importance of challenging deep-rooted assumptions, and explore how the participants' perspectives shaped my understanding of allyship and what allyship looks like in music and education. Finally, I present suggestions for future research and my concluding reflections on the project.

Reflections

Summary of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore gender inclusion in traditionally single-gender choral ensembles. The narrative centered around two conductors, Megan and Chris, as they provided their background on gender and music and considered the implications of gender in their women's and men's choirs, respectively. The women's and men's choir students also provided an additional layer to the narrative as they shared their perspectives of the ensemble and reflected on gender inclusion in ensembles traditionally classified by gender and typically defined by gender exclusion.

Megan and the singers in the women's choir explored inclusion in the choir and considered the policies, practices, attitudes, philosophies, and goals of the students and conductor within the ensemble. Initially, Megan and the women's choir students assumed that many of the students were of a similar mindset with the women's choir as a place that was empowering and inclusive, but through anonymous surveys, individual interviews, and group discussions, it became clear that many students had reservations about the gendered classification of the

ensemble and felt that trans and gender-expansive students may not feel welcome if they were not cisgender women. It also became clear that many of the students assumed that everyone in the ensemble was a cisgender woman, which left trans and nonbinary singers in the ensemble feeling alienated. Through group discussions, a number of trans and gender-expansive singers—some of whom had disclosed their gender identity and some who had not—anonously voiced their disconnect between the ensemble and their gender identities. Group discussions, including the perspectives of the trans and gender-expansive singers in the choir, led Megan and many of the singers to solidify their feelings that the ensemble’s gender classification acted against the inclusion goals of the choir.

Through a series of discussions and workshops, Megan and the students changed the name and classification of the ensemble, moving away from a gendered model. In the course description and ensemble bio, they defined the choir as one that typically sings treble repertoire but accepts singers with a variety of gender identities and voice types. Because Megan valued women’s spaces, she was initially concerned that moving away from being a women’s choir would negatively impact the empowering community she had so consciously developed. Over the course of the project, however, Megan concluded that being more inclusive of trans and gender-expansive singers did not hinder women’s empowerment, but rather expanded their goals and the population of students who were a part of the ensemble. Moving forward, Megan said she was dedicated to diversifying the narratives centered through repertoire selection and continuing to encourage conversations, discussions, and discourses surrounding social justice issues within the choir. Although some students were concerned that cisgender men would use the new classification as a way to join the choir, Megan said that the scenario in which it made most sense for cisgender men to participate in women’s choir was through the capacity of

assistant conductor and that she did not anticipate that cisgender men would be singing in the ensemble in the immediate future.

Chris and the men's choir students found value in singing in men's choirs, particularly in light of the negative connotations surrounding men singing in choral ensembles. Although choral methods textbooks have traditionally encouraged conductors to embrace the masculine aspect of men's choirs through recruitment efforts and singing sea chanteys, drinking songs, and other songs that can embrace unhealthy stereotypes and disparaging women, Chris intentionally pushed back against these methods. He purposefully used the men's choir as a place to challenge traditional masculine ideals and approach topics that are often taboo for men in society, such as mental health issues, and to use their privileged place in society as men to lift up minoritized perspectives and be better allies. Both Chris and the students spoke of the duality of men's choirs being a place for trans men to feel acceptance while simultaneously presenting an image that is not inclusive of a variety of gender identities.

Although Chris and the students of the men's choir did not actively make any changes at this time, both Chris and the singers acknowledged that change was on the horizon and that conversations were happening at the choir and department level. Given the long history of the ensemble and the strong presence of the choir's alumni association, Chris believed that the process of change, including a name change, would require thoughtful engagement of the students, community, and alumni to ensure that those who are invested in the ensemble feel that their perspectives would be included throughout the process of change. Chris believed it was long past due for the change to occur, but the students seemed more hesitant, which furthered his commitment to engaging the students throughout the process so their concerns are validated and addressed as the ensemble moves forward.

Reflections Throughout Research Process

Sharing My Perspective: Striking a Balance

The origins of my dissertation came from personal experience, and I had to negotiate my relationship to the topic as a researcher, educator, and musician. Like Thomas-Durrell (2019), I sought to highlight the perspectives of the participants all while seeing my personal experiences reflected in those of Megan, Chris, and the students. These shared experiences allowed me to connect with the participants, and at times I believe it allowed participants to open up to me more easily as they saw me as a confidant:

Megan: But in terms of how my high school choirs were gendered or not—I mean, small Catholic school, those conversations would have never come up in the 90s, 2000s. It just would have never been a thing. It would have been the opposite, right? In terms of the big scope of social justice and those conversations.

Jessica: Right! Or even at a very basic level for me as a kid, I know that my music teachers specifically recruited for boys, and if girls joined, that was *fine*. It never crossed my mind that that would be wrong until I was probably 19 or 20 and sang in a women's choir in college and then watched the sort of people that got into the auditioned choir and was frustrated (Megan: Mhm) that I felt like I was held to a different standard than my male peers.

Megan: Yeah. I would say for me, I don't even think I came to that realization until later—like post-undergrad. Because in my undergrad—again, smaller school—we didn't have a gender breakdown for the university choirs. It was just all mixed. And that was it. And so I never had to think about it, or I never had those experiences. But in high school, it was so clear that the director recruited for boys. And the musicals that she would pick

were always male-featured for the good male singers, and then the next would be a female lead. So that was clear—and clear to me in high school. Clear to others in high school. (Interview, 11/10/2021)

The above is an example of a time when I shared my experience, particularly one that I thought was similar to those of the participants, and it sparked more information than I may have garnered otherwise.

The participants often encouraged me to share my perspective and reflect on what I might do if I were in their situation. Because I recruited participants through purposeful sampling methods, I was well aware that the conductors both prioritized inclusion and sought to adopt more inclusive practices in their ensembles. Megan and Chris’s approach to diversity, equity, and inclusion often involved seeking out my advice. At times, I struggled to balance sharing my perspective without shaping their perspectives, particularly when my own recommendations for gender inclusion in ensembles were continually evolving. In these instances, I attempted to display vulnerability by sharing my internal conflicts and struggles and the ways in which my opinions about gender inclusion had changed over the course of the dissertation.

Holding Myself Accountable (For Now and the Future)

Throughout this project, I sought to work collaboratively with Megan, Chris, and the singers of the LU Women’s Choir and DSU Men’s Choir to both tell their stories and offer guidance to choral conductors seeking to address gender inclusion in traditionally single-gender choral ensembles. Throughout the process, I reflected on feminism, queer theory, and transgender theory to highlight multiple perspectives and to shy away from binary ways of thinking. With Megan and the LU Women’s Choir, I created a specific avenue for singers to anonymously share their perspectives to make sure multiple viewpoints were present throughout

the process. At the same time, I attempted to filter responses in a way that would make the students feel safe, particularly the trans and gender-expansive singers in the choir. Multiple student comments, however, showed that I was not always successful in creating a safe and welcoming environment, with some trans and gender-expansive students saying that some other students' comments were transphobic. Given the short time span of this project, I cannot know for certain the lasting impacts of such comments and the specific ways I contributed to a system that imposes harmful gendered expectations on singers of a variety of gender identities.

As I worked with the LU Women's Choir, I worked under the assumption that my perspective would allow me to guide the discussion in a way that was safe for everyone, and the reality is that I was unable to do so, in part because of my perspective as a cisgender woman. Although I sought for the discussions to be student-driven, I did not leave a lot of space for students to interpret the data presented and determine next steps forward, including restorative practices within the ensemble. I am sure that much of this comes from years of teaching and conducting where I have been the sole leader of the ensemble—a practice I will continue to unlearn throughout my teaching career. If I were to conduct a project like this one in the future, I would have a panel of students and community members represented in the interpretation of the discussion and survey responses to ensure that multiple perspectives were represented in the analysis of the data, as well as determining the next steps forward.

Applying Theory

In framing the dissertation and analyzing the data, I applied multiple frameworks with different effects. I, along with many of the participants in the study, come from a background rooted in feminism. I acknowledge that feminism has historically been rooted in whiteness, middle-class ideals, and is often hyper-focused on cisgender women, rather than acknowledging

the ways in which the patriarchy impacts individuals of all gender identities. Black feminist scholars such as hooks (2000), Collins (2012), and Crenshaw (1991) challenge such thinking with an intersectional approach that acknowledges and embraces differences in identities and the ways in which multiple identities impact an individual, their position in society, and their worldview. I saw it as essential to study the feminist nature of my worldview, as well as many of the participants, to better understand our perspectives. Although there was a limited intersectional approach to gender identity in the data, interrogating feminist thinking through an intersectional perspective helped me come to better understand the whiteness pervasive in discussions of gender. The majority of the active participants in this study, including Megan, Chris, and myself, were white, which reflects the majority white population that teaches secondary music in the United States (Elpus, 2015). As a result, the participants, including myself, frame their perspectives based on their own experiences, which were inevitably influenced by their race. Additionally, because most of the participants were white and privileged because of their race, I was not surprised to find that race was largely not present in discussions surrounding identity. For groups such as the women's and men's choirs that center on identity, they can fall into the trappings of identity politics, which can cater to the politic and social desires of those within the dominant group (such as those who are white, cisgender, and heterosexual). Below, I discuss how aspects such as race and gender can influence individuals' and groups' identity and the ways in which identity politics can influence individual and group identity and belonging.

Identity Politics. Feminism, queer theory, and trans theory are models of the conflicting results of movements centered on identity. Social movements centered on identity politics can be a source of “strength, community, and intellectual development” (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1242). At

the same time, uniting under the banner of “women,” “queer,” or “trans” can abandon people at the margins of a social movement claiming to stand for “all women/queer/trans individuals” while representing the experiences of few. A focus on identity can also encourage an “us-versus-them” mentality that presents as tension between two groups in apparent opposition, such as lesbians in the feminist movement versus lesbians relating to queer theory. Identity politics can foster infighting that squashes “otherness,” gives the dominant group a sense of higher moral ground, and forces out those unwilling to conform to the group’s presumed universal identity (hooks, 2000; Lorber, 2018). Hyper focus on defining identities can recreate the very power structures these identities are trying to defeat (Crenshaw, 1991). At times in this dissertation, a focus on identity resulted in an “us-versus-them” mentality that pitted the desires of cisgender and trans and gender-expansive musicians against one other, leading participants away from the inclusion efforts upon which they were seeking to focus.

Particularly in capitalist societies, identity politics can encourage a sense of individualism among its followers. Many women were drawn to the second wave of feminism because of its focus on individual freedom. Like queer theory, the idea that “woman” or “queer” can be worn in a way that uniquely fits every individual makes it incredibly difficult to band together in solidarity (hooks, 2000). An identity that is individualized also does not encourage the group to critique how knowledge and power operate from outside and within the group itself (Lorber, 2018). As a result, these theories are apt to focus on oppression experienced by individuals while failing to focus on the structures that oppress people of all gender identities (Lorber, 2017). For some choirs, this could mean acknowledging that gendered ensembles create barriers for trans and gender-expansive students while simultaneously resisting necessary changes to make the choirs gender-inclusive.

Identity politics do not lend themselves to recognizing differences within the group as it challenges the identity on which the group centers. Black feminists have long argued that the idea of “sisterhood” within the feminist movement is not inclusive of all women and caters to the political desires of white, middle- and upper-class women (Apsani, 2018). When conditions of belonging are solidified, it makes it increasingly difficult to recognize that identity is not fixed on the individual or group level. The idea of what it means to be a “woman,” “transgender man,” or “bisexual” is constantly evolving because there is not a universal understanding of gender, sex, sexuality, and how they are defined, let alone experienced (Stark, 2017).

Although there is a difference between shared experience and shared identity, identity politics tend to conflate the two (Crenshaw, 1991). Collins (2000) acknowledged that while there is no “Black *woman*’s standpoint...it may be more accurate to say that a Black *women*’s collective standpoint does exist, one characterized by the tensions that accrue to different responses to common challenges” (p. 28). Collins explains that not all Black women experience the same sort of discrimination—for example, access to housing disproportionately affects those who are poor when compared to their middle-class counterparts—nor do they react to similar discriminations in the same way. This does not deter from the fact that black women are able to see how black *women*, rather than a Black *woman* as an individual, are more apt to experience institutionalized discrimination on the basis of race as compared to white feminists. The same could be said of singers who are not part of the groups often assumed to be dominant in choral ensembles (i.e., white, cisgender, heterosexual, Christian, middle class singers). Acknowledging the identity politics present in groups defined by gender, approaching the project and continually critiquing my methods with an intersectional approach was an essential way for me to address the biases the participants and I had as related to our privileged identities.

Participants Reflecting Theory. As I analyzed the data, I perceived that many of the calls to maintain gendered structures were rooted in feminist ideals, such as women's empowerment and challenging cisheteronormativity in men's spaces. Many of the calls for change, however, embraced elements of queer and transgender theory. For example, the very notion of moving away from gendered ensemble structures reflects queer theory's call to question and disrupt structures that have long been held as the norm and presumed correct ways of working and existing in the world. As Megan, Chris, and the students reflected on the complex and at times contradictory nature of inclusion in traditionally single-gender choral ensembles, many participants began to move away from what transgender theorist Roen (2002) referred to as "either/or" thinking (such as male or female) and toward a view of "both/neither" (acknowledging that there are individuals who embrace binary conceptions of gender, people who reject them all together, and individuals who fluctuate between both or identify somewhere in between). Each of these frameworks—feminism, queer theory, trans theory—are a means for both analyzing oppression as linked to multiple sites of identity and troubling what has been accepted as normal and status quo. Utilizing each of these frameworks allowed me to recognize my own biases and tendencies toward a feminist approach and explore the ways in which queer and trans theories allow me to interrogate assumptions about gender and its function in choral music education. I also came to realize the continued need for me to interrogate my understandings of gender and make them more complex through an intersectional approach, and that I must work to center perspectives of individuals beyond those who are white, cisgender, Christian, and middle-class, which I will discuss more below.

Intersectionality

At the outset of this project, I sought to take an intersectional approach (Crenshaw, 1991;

hooks, 2000; Misra, 2018) to the research process and interrogate the ways in which gender intersected with a variety of identities, such as race and sexuality. Although themes beyond gender were present, I found that issues such as race and religion did not organically and consistently present themselves throughout the research process, even with my prompting as a researcher. I hypothesize that an intersectional approach to gender inclusion was not as present because the vast majority of the participants were white, cisgender, and heterosexual, and I had a sense that many of them were new to intersectional thinking. Because of the complex nature of gender in and of itself, much of the data focused on gender and its multifaceted relationship to choral music, at times becoming so hyper-focused that intersections of multiple identities were often missing throughout the discourse. My experience as a researcher in this dissertation speaks to the importance of scholarship that specifically interrogates intersecting identities, such as Thomas-Durrell's (2019) study of race, religion, and sexuality in the Bible Belt of the United States.

(Un)intentionally Putting the Onus on Minoritized Individuals

Megan, Chris, and I all had shared experiences of trans and gender-expansive students helping to educate us and shape our philosophies and practices surrounding gender-inclusion in choral ensembles. In the women's choir, trans and gender-expansive singers who shared their personal experiences in gendered spaces positively influenced the other singers to consider the impact that gendered choirs had on the identities of trans and gender-expansive singers. The personal connections we made with trans and gender-expansive students were impactful, and yet it is necessary to problematize learning about inclusion from minoritized individuals. As an example, one queer student in the choir shared that while she did not mind having conversations

with people about LGBTQIA+ experiences and rights, there were many questions asked of her that could have easily been read about online.

Although some minoritized individuals may be eager to share their experiences and advocate for themselves and others, educators must not put the onus on minoritized individuals to educate others. At times, teachers may intentionally ask students to share their experiences in an effort to center diverse narratives, and at other times, they may unintentionally require students to share their perspectives by only making policy changes once a complaint has arisen. Teachers must prioritize fostering relationships with students and creating an environment that empowers students to share their needs and experiences and shows students that the teacher is open to feedback and change. Simultaneously, teachers must educate themselves about the needs of trans and gender-expansive students so it does not place responsibility on the students to advocate for inclusion.

When it comes to challenging policies and tradition, I have had teachers say things along the lines of, “Well, no one has complained,” implying that if there have been no complaints that the problem must not be significant enough to warrant change. Such reasoning does not account for the power dynamics present between teacher and student, conductor and singer, and individual singers as part of a greater choral community. Ideally, teachers would foster environments in which students could challenge policies and practices, but in reality, ensemble members may not feel they can safely share their perspectives, regardless of the relationship they have with their peers, conductor, or community. Rather than waiting for complaints to make changes to ensemble names, uniforms, and other policies and practices that can harm minoritized individuals, conductors and singers must continually reflect on these policies and practices to determine the ways in which the ensemble can be more inclusive. Change is not something that

happens in a singular moment, but rather is continually reflexive and evolving depending on the time, people, and context.

Challenging Binary Thinking

Although a constructionist understanding of gender is becoming more commonplace throughout society, the ways in which gender is dictated throughout society are still very much rooted in an essentialist framework, working under the assumption that gender exists on a binary. As such, the participants in the study and I continue to work through our understanding of gender inclusion that includes more than trans men and women. Because many of the discussions that took place in this dissertation centered on trans men and women, I had and continue to have concerns about how I leave room for other identities. For example, while a trans man may feel validated in a men's choir, the same may not be true for someone who is gender fluid or agender. There is still much work to be done in society and music education with regards to binary thinking with regards to gender. An inclusive approach to gender cannot be one that is rooted in binary or it will inevitably not consider people of a variety of gender identities.

Gender Inclusion in Gender-Exclusive Spaces

Prior to this study, my primary concern was inclusion as it related to gender in spaces traditionally defined by gender. After talking with the women's and men's choir singers, a number of them brought up a concept that I had not considered: can someone claim to be inclusive while specifically excluding others? Although some of the singers in the women's choir specifically valued that there were not cisgender men in the women's ensemble, some singers were uncomfortable at the concept of claiming inclusivity while excluding cisgender men who could otherwise sing soprano or alto. Many gender-exclusive spaces, like women's and men's choirs, are founded on the principals of creating a space in which a particular gender

identity can find a sense of community and belonging, and yet the spaces are defined by exclusion. As singers in the women's choir pointed out, the values highlighted in their choir, particularly those centered around social justice, are values from which singers of all gender identities would benefit. If other ensembles do not focus on social justice issues, would cisgender men, for example, be at a loss of a learning opportunity? Is it the right of the students to have access and an opportunity to learn from these spaces? There are no easy answers, and inclusion in exclusive spaces is a topic that deserves continued research and consideration, which I will discuss later this chapter.

Determining Allyship

Over the course of the research project, my conception of allyship evolved. Although I previously would have called myself an ally, I now believe that I cannot be the person to determine if my actions adequately reflect my allyship goals and if my efforts are effectively creating inclusive environments. As a cisgender woman, I believe my privilege and membership in the dominant group hinder my ability to accurately, and without bias, determine if I am an ally to trans and gender-expansive individuals. Currently, I think of the term “ally” as one that is given to you by someone else. My new conception of allyship is reminiscent of hooks's (2000) call for switching from an identity mindset (such as “I am an ally to trans and gender-expansive individuals”) to one centered on advocacy (“I advocate the rights of trans and gender-expansive individuals”). I firmly believe that it is those who are minoritized, not those who are privileged, who have the final say on if I am doing right by them, as well as identifying any areas in which I am falling short in my advocacy. I encourage teachers to reflect on similar sentiments as a way to decenter themselves and the benefits they reap from fostering inclusivity (such as awards and

feel-good messages from students and community members) and refocus their allyship efforts onto the needs and desires of minoritized individuals.

Implications, Considerations, and Recommendations

The perspectives, experiences, and implications of this study are unique to the individual participants in this dissertation. Given the scope of the study and the limited sample size, music educators should take caution against applying the individualized experiences of Megan, Chris, and the students of the LU women's choir and DSU men's choir to their own settings. However, I intend the data presented in this dissertation to provide a starting point and potential framework through which other musicians and educators can consider their own circumstances, challenge long held assumptions and norms about gender in music, and make changes that empower trans and gender-expansive individuals in music programs. Because this dissertation sought to address research puzzles rather than answer research questions, much of the discussion below addresses implications and considerations resulting from the data. I do make several recommendations based on my observations while acknowledging the layers of complexity and number of individuals involved in making decisions for a given choral program.

Choral Policies and Practices

Choral conductors must prioritize creating policies that are explicit in their gender inclusion. Although policies include elements such as choir structures and uniforms, teachers also have considerable influence on the inclusivity of a given choral ensemble through teaching practices such as literature selection and the language they utilize in and outside of rehearsal. Below, I will discuss inclusive language, literature selection, uniforms, program hierarchies and ensemble structures, voice classification, and elements of policy and practice that are specific to trans and gender-expansive singers.

Inclusive Language

Gendered language is pervasive in choral music, and it is all the more present in ensembles traditionally classified by gender. Although gendered language and discourse has historically been encouraged for recruitment, particularly of male singers (Barham, 2001; Reed, 2009; Trott, 2020), there are many ways in which choral music educators can reframe terms and discussions away from gendered terminology, particularly those which are not inherently gendered. For example, rather than referring to singers as “women” or “men”—which imply both that all singers have felt they can disclose their gender identities and that gender and voice type are inherently linked—conductors can use terms such as “singers,” “sopranos,” and “basses.” By utilizing language that does not make assumptions about singers’ gender identities, conductors can positively contribute to an environment in which students are more likely to feel that they can safely disclose their gender identity and that they are trusted and valued. Later this chapter, I will address some terms and phrases that teachers may hear or use when discussing trans and gender-expansive individuals and the terminology currently advocated for by trans and gender-expansive individuals and scholars.

In recent years, I have seen trends of schools and places of employment starting off the school year by having everyone introduce themselves and their pronouns. This approach is often applied in an attempt to normalize asking for and providing pronouns, but it can have unintended consequences, particularly for individuals who may not be ready to disclose their gender identity and are thus caught off guard and feel uncomfortable from the start. Teachers can provide students other opportunities for sharing their pronouns, such as individual surveys distributed at the beginning of class in which a singer self-discloses their pronouns and the situations in which the conductor can use the students’ pronouns. For example, while a singer may disclose their

gender identity to a conductor in private and go by he/him/his in individual meetings with the conductor, they may not be ready to reveal their gender identity to their peers or family members and may ask the conductor to refrain from using the students' pronouns in front of others.

In the spirit of an intersectional approach, conductors may also give students the opportunity to share the identities that mean the most to them, which may include their gender identity and pronouns. For some singers, they may choose to center their gender or religious identities if those identities are among the most salient. For example, a singer may share that they are female, use she/her/hers pronouns, and are Muslim if those identities are the most prominent in their personal conceptions of themselves, but may not share their racial identity out of concerns for safety or because it is not among the identities with which they most prominently identify. This sort of approach allows individuals to share the identities they value most with the conductor and their peers, if they so choose, and empowers the individuals to shape the ways in which others view them while encouraging singers and teachers to remember and prioritize the intersectional nature of identity.

By learning about the specific terms that students use to describe themselves, this also opens an opportunity to learn about terms with which teachers may be unfamiliar and to inquire about what those terms mean to the individual student. For example, a student may identify as queer, but the definition for the term queer (like many identities) is incredibly individualized and personal. Learning about and prioritizing students' identities is a powerful way for teachers to make connections with their students, ensure students are represented in the curriculum, and find ways to discuss and act on allyship.

Literature Selection and Discussion

Because women's, treble, men's, and tenor-bass ensembles have traditionally been

classified by gender, much of the literature available to these ensembles centers female, male, and cisgender perspectives. Although women's and men's choirs pieces may empower some, conductors must remember that singers who are not cisgender or who do not align with privileged groups in society may have the opposite experience. When trans and gender-expansive singers never see their perspectives reflected in the repertoire, they may question whether they belong in the ensemble or if they can share their perspective when it differs from ones expressed in the music or discourse of the ensemble.

As conductors program music, I encourage conductors to focus on the text of a given piece to determine if it embraces harmful stereotypes and assumptions related to gender. If it does, conductors can choose to select new repertoire. Recognizing the pervasiveness of gendered stereotypes in choral music, conductors can also consult with students and allow them to discuss their comfort level with the given piece of music and potentially not program it. Alternatively, conductors and students may choose to program the piece and use it as a means for discussing the impact of harmful stereotypes. Conductors who choose this approach must exercise caution, however, and engage the audience in the discussion, as well, so the audience is aware of the discourse surrounding the piece and the ways in which the singers problematized the piece.

Because most choral music presumes the perspective of the text is from a cisgender perspective, there are a limited number of known choral pieces that recognize the diverse nature of gender identity. For pieces that are explicitly from a cisgender perspective, conductors must problematize the nature of this discourse and broaden discussions to include a variety of gender identities. Conductors may also consider altering pronouns to better fit the needs of their singers.

Uniforms

The most common choral uniforms I see fall into three categories: choir robes, matching

tuxedos/suits and dresses, and uniform/themed color (such as concert black or a pastel palette for a Spring concert). I will not deny the crisp and professional look of choir robes and tuxedos, suits, and dresses. Many conductors may be in positions where they feel they cannot change uniforms, or at least not immediately. A teacher new to a school, for example, may realize that students take immense pride in their uniforms and choose to not make changes to the uniform in their first year as a way to limit the amount of change and pushback in their first year at that given school. Some schools have an entire set of choir robes or may have invested tens of thousands of dollars into tuxedos and dresses. Situations like these require conductors to consider the context of their schools and communities and know the ways in which they can advocate for change.

Although gender should be taken into consideration with uniform selection, uniforms are an example of an element of choir that requires an intersectional approach. Choir robes, for example, are traditionally associated with Christianity and are often worn by members of the clergy or choirs during religious holiday services or performances. The use of choir robes may leave students who are not Christian feeling alienated given that they are not part of the dominant religious group, or they may be triggering for students who have or are currently experiencing trauma related to religion. Tuxedos, suits, and dresses are inherently gendered, which may prevent trans and gender-expansive singers from feeling welcome and accepted or even capable of auditioning for the group. There is also a presumed image of what someone may look like in a tuxedo, suit, and dress, and singers of a variety of body types may find that the prescribed uniform is either not offered in their size or that the uniform does not fit their body in ways that make the singer feel comfortable. Robes, tuxedos, suits, and dresses also have value judgments placed on them in relation to class. Conductors must consider the messages that “sharp,” “crisp,”

and “uniform” outfits send to students about values attached to appearance and the relationship between clothes, the privileged nature of “professional appearance,” and class. Because of the intersections of multiple identities in choral music, aspects such as uniforms require a multifaceted approach.

As someone who struggled with accepting her femininity for most of my life, if I had been required to wear dresses in a performing ensemble, I would have certainly considered not joining the ensemble at all. I have also been a part of ensembles that require all singers of all gender identities to wear a uniform traditionally associated with masculinity, such as tuxedo shirts and cummerbunds. Some educators may see this as a compromise to a uniform appearance for a group, as it is socially acceptable for women to wear button-ups and slacks, but I know that even as a cisgender individual, I was uncomfortable at the number of occasions in my life that I was told that I looked like a boy and the assumptions about my sexuality based on my physical appearance. For trans and gender-expansive singers, binary uniforms may be a symbol of the ways in which the ensemble continues to embrace binary constructions of gender, leading them to feel unwelcome in the ensemble.

I believe one of the simplest approaches to uniforms is the use of “concert black,” which allows all singers to choose clothes in which they feel most comfortable while still adhering to a more uniform appearance for the ensemble. For conductors who walk into programs with prescribed uniforms, teachers should make it clear to their students that they can approach the conductor about alternative uniforms that would make the singer more comfortable. Conductors can also engage singers throughout the year in discussions about their current uniform options and explore other options that may more closely align with students’ interests and comfort levels.

Trans and Gender-Expansive Singers

Singers are the experts of their own experiences. Trans and gender-expansive students are not a monolith, and each singer will have goals unique to their personal experiences and identity journey. As noted by Palkki (2016), some trans and gender-expansive singers may see their speaking and singing voice as an essential part of their gender expression while others may not. As such, teachers must communicate directly with singers to determine what their goals and needs are, rather than assuming students' needs, and collaborate with students to determine which voice part and ensemble most closely align to the students immediate and long-term goals.

Vocal Health and Mental Health. As I have worked with teachers in a variety of settings, many teachers have voiced concern about trans and gender-expansive singers exploring new parts of their vocal range as a potential part of the singers' transitions. The heart of their concern is students' vocal health. I have heard teachers worry about trans women singing in upper registers when the singer may not have fully developed their head voice or falsetto, or a trans man singing in a men's or tenor-bass ensemble when they may not be able to hit all of the notes.

The implications of voice classification impact all singers. Although choral pedagogues advocate for rotating singers between voice parts (Gackle, 2011; Sweet & Parker, 2019)—such as having treble singers sing soprano on half of the songs and alto on the other half—in my personal experience, I have seen that practice dwindle as students get older. Before I started rotating students evenly between voice parts, my rationales for keeping them on a single voice part were centered on rationales such as allowing students to sing the part that aided them balancing and blending, highlighting where I thought singers sounded best, and balancing sections. As I interrogated the practice, I came to the difficult conclusion that the reason I didn't

want students to rotate through parts was because I wanted the choir to sound as strong as possible. I challenge choir teachers to ask themselves: am I primarily concerned with teaching students to sing, or I am concerned with having choirs that sound good? I came to the realization that my focus was on the latter, and as such, I was prioritizing my image as a choir teacher over the education of the students.

Some trans and gender-expansive singers may be comfortable singing in their current vocal range, and others may wish to explore new parts of their range. Teachers can work with students within class, one-on-one, provide them with contact information for voice teachers, and help connect them with health professionals. Although teachers may have concerns for students' vocal health, a students' mental health should also be taken into consideration, and it is not the place of a teacher to determine if a student should prioritize their vocal or their mental health.

Voice Classification

Because of the gendered structures attached to choir and singing, voice classification continues to be associated with gender, with teachers and singers assuming women sing soprano and alto and men sing tenor and bass. There are notable exceptions, such as men singing countertenor and women singing contralto with a lower extension. Such classifications do not take into consideration the vocal needs of trans and gender-expansive singers, including where their voices currently reside and what their long-term vocal goals are (e.g., a trans woman who currently sings bass but would like to train to sing in a treble ensemble). For singers who either do not identify as male or female or do so but not exclusively, conductors may make assumptions about a students' voice classification based on their perception of a singer's gender identity and expression.

There continues to be assumptions about voice classification for cisgender singers. Although some cisgender men may have a well-developed head voice or may train as countertenors, in my experience, it is less common for cisgender women to sing tenor. If conductors move away from gendered choral ensemble models, they may find that cisgender women and men may voice interest in singing in tenor-bass and treble choirs, respectively. I encourage teachers to question their assumptions about voice classification as it relates to gender and work with students individually to determine their short- and long-term musical goals, including exploring different parts of their range, and from there working to figure out which choral ensemble best meets the interests of their singers. I will continue to discuss this below.

Women and Men in Tenor-Bass and Treble Ensembles

Out of all the topics that I discussed with the participants, I feel there were the least concrete answers and formulated thoughts about the potential of cisgender women to sing in men's and tenor-bass ensembles and cisgender men to sing in women's and treble ensembles. If the choirs continue to be classified by gender, there is likely legal justification, particularly under Title IX if a school offers both a women's and a men's choir, for excluding women from men's choirs and men from women's choirs. However, if choirs move away from gendered structures altogether, conductors may see men wanting to sing in treble choirs for musical or social reasons, as well as women in tenor-bass ensembles. I am intrigued by the opportunity for singers to explore voice parts that are not typically associated with their gender, such as women singing in a tenor-bass ensemble. As Chris pointed out, however, there are many social factors at play in these ensembles, and students in both the women's and men's choirs voiced concern about the culture of the choir being impacted by women and men joining men's/tenor-bass and women's/treble choirs, respectively. Because more than a quarter of undergraduate women

experience sexual assault (RAINN, n.d.), women may find solace in women's spaces as perhaps the only spaces on campus or in their lives where they do not have to interact with men. For spaces like the DSU men's choir where conductors interrogate harmful associations with masculinity, singers may feel more comfortable being vulnerable in spaces without women.

Given the nuanced nature of gender and identity, there is not one single solution that will work for all students, conductors, and choirs. Choral educators should talk with students to learn about the gender environment within the ensemble, why the students signed up for the choir, what they value in membership, and from there determine the best path forward in collaboration with the students. Issues related to gender are also not one-and-done conversations to be had with students, but rather discussions that must happen throughout the course of the year and across years to determine if changes must be made in the future to address diversity, equity, and inclusion goals.

Communication

Over the course of the study, it became apparent that communication was central to the discussion of gender in choral ensembles. Both Megan and Chris stressed the important role that communication played in their developing understandings of gender in choirs and their journey toward moving away from gendered ensembles. For each of them, they came to that conclusion based on conversations they had with both cisgender and trans and gender-expansive singers over the course of their careers. Because the students in this study voiced the value they garnered from engaging in difficult conversations, there are broader implications for a number of other topics that can be sensitive in schools, particularly related to identity, such as race and religion.

Teachers must take special care to ensure that minoritized students feel safe within the classroom as their peers who may be in the dominant group discuss issues related to the civil

rights of those who are minoritized. Although conversations and discussions about difficult topics can be meaningful for students who have never considered the implications of such topics, the growth of the dominant group cannot exist at the sacrifice of the safety and wellbeing of minoritized individuals. It is essential that educators create an environment in which students have no doubt that they can raise questions and concerns with their teacher with regards to inclusion. Additionally, educators must not assume that students will reach out to them to voice concerns and should give students opportunities to check in either in class or in private.

Considering External Image of Ensemble

Even in the most inclusive of spaces, people who are not a part of the community may perceive the space to be exclusive for a variety of reasons. For example, if a choir has a gendered label (i.e., “women’s choir” or “men’s choir), wears gendered uniforms (i.e., tuxedos or dresses), and sings music that focuses on cisheteronormative perspectives (i.e., songs about cisgender or heterosexual women and men), community members and prospective choir singers may not feel that they would be welcome to join the choir, even if the choir is inclusive. A conductor may provide uniform accommodations for students who do not wish to wear dresses or tuxedos, but if no one in the choir deviates from the standard and traditional choir uniform, then audience members and potential future members of the ensemble may not know that deviation is even possible.

Visible, Intentional, and Explicit Allyship

Even when individuals such as conductors and students see themselves as allies and feel their actions reflect their commitment to inclusion, those who are minoritized may not feel welcome or included. For example, one of the LU women’s choir singers who was not cisgender anonymously asked Megan and I to clarify that we were allies. Megan was taken aback because

she thought her actions, including taking on the project to consider inclusion in the ensemble, were a clear reflection of her allyship, but the student needed oral reassurance. It is thus necessary for those who seek to be allies to not only do so in action, but in word.

Teachers have considerable influence on things such as school policy, curriculum, and normalizing the discussion of trans and gender-expansive topics in education (Palkki, 2016) and have an important role to play in terms of LGBTQIA+ students feeling safe at school (Palkki & Caldwell, 2018; Silveira & Goff, 2016). Because students are more likely to disclose their gender identity to teachers than they are their parents or grandparents (Grossman & D'Augelli, 2006), teachers must create an environment in which students can safely disclose their gender identity when they may feel it is unsafe to do so in other situations. I acknowledge the complexities of this, particularly for teachers concerned about job security in a community that may not support LGBTQIA+ individuals. Teachers must consider the ways they speak in their classroom, how they identify themselves, and the language that they use and reflect on if their words are as explicit as possible with relation to their allyship. One of the ways teachers can do this is by openly talking about gender identity and expression in their classroom so students know they can talk about it, also (Palkki & Caldwell, 2018).

Conversely, simply saying you seek to be an ally is not enough. Words and action must go hand in hand. Teachers have influence over literature selection, ensemble uniforms, and school policy and should use their influence to openly and actively support trans and gender-expansive singers. Megan and Chris are excellent examples of ways that teachers can create environments in which students can give input and have agency within the ensemble. As both conductors realized, students may not feel comfortable pushing back against certain policies or voicing their concerns, even when teachers attempt to create environments in which students are

empowered to have their voices heard. Teachers must remember that even if no one has voiced concern about things such as uniforms and ensemble classification, it does not mean that no one has felt othered by such policies. Megan learned a lot about students' perspectives through anonymous surveys, and teachers may consider ways to have anonymous feedback from students to help address power dynamics that are present between teachers and students. For example, as an exit ticket, teachers could have a survey about students' comfort levels related to a potential song on the concert program, and students could respond via an anonymous online survey.

Choral Program Hierarchies and Ensemble Structures

For many choir programs, women's and men's choirs have often been an entry point for singers and a place for conductors to focus on voice building according to voice type. Teachers believe that singers behave better in gendered ensembles, particularly early on in their choral experiences, and that students are more likely to take risks if singers of the opposing gender are not in the classroom (Carp, 2004). A number of scholars have also noted the value of men's choirs for recruitment of male and tenor-bass singers (Barham, 2001; Reed, 2008; Trott, 2020) and women's choirs as a place for empowering female singers (Bartolome, 2013; Parker, 2018). However, women's choirs have historically been viewed as inferior to mixed, men's, and tenor-bass ensembles (Gauthier, 2005; O'Toole, 1998; Wilson, 2010, 2012, 2013), and music written for gendered choirs can embrace harmful gender stereotypes (Palkki, 2015). Conductors must take all of these factors into consideration when determining the structure of their choirs and acknowledging the role that gender plays in the hierarchy of a given choral program.

For singers who are not cisgender, gendered ensembles can create a barrier for entry and make singers feel that they may not be welcome in the ensemble or that membership is not open to them because of their gender identity. They may also feel like they cannot contribute to

conversations that center the binary identities of female and male, which can be particularly challenging for groups that embrace the gendered nature of the ensemble. Additionally, I have growing concern that gendered choirs contribute to an environment in which singers and conductors make assumptions about an individuals' gender identity based on their membership in the ensemble, which can make it more challenging for a singer to disclose their gender identity.

Although both Megan and Chris sought to use gendered ensembles as a place to defy gender stereotypes, both conductors felt that the gendered nature of the ensemble worked counter to the gender inclusion efforts of the ensemble. As such, Megan and the singers of the women's choir chose to move away from gendered choral structures. Chris believed it was time for the men's choir to reclassify as a tenor-bass ensemble, but a number of students expressed that they wanted to continue to be classified by gender and assumed similar sentiments were present in the community and among alumni given the longstanding history of the ensemble.

Throughout the course of this project, my feelings surrounding gendered ensembles and the role they play in singers' lives has evolved and fluctuated. At this point in my professional career, I believe that moving away from gendered structures, such as women's and men's choirs, is the simplest and most clear-cut approach to gender inclusion in choral programs. That being said, simply changing the name and description of an ensemble does not inherently make an ensemble inclusive. It is essential that conductors address the policies and practices within the ensemble and explicitly and continually state their allyship (which I will discuss later in this chapter).

Although I believe that moving away from gendered choral structures is the most straightforward way to address gender inclusion in traditionally single-gender choral ensembles,

I have sought to approach this dissertation with a nuanced approach that acknowledges the individual situations of students, conductors, and the communities in which they reside. As a singer, some of my most impactful and life changing musical and personal moments have happened within women's choirs under the leadership of conductors seeking to lift up and empower both their singers and minoritized identities. In working with Megan and Chris, I was moved at their dedication to use gendered choirs as a way to specifically push back against harmful gender stereotypes. I know the history and immense sense of pride that come from ensembles such as community women's choirs and gay men's choruses, and I am not calling for such organizations to be dissolved. Many of these organizations have been intentional in their inclusion efforts and have successfully recruited a gender-diverse membership while creating impactful musical and social experiences.

For conductors who direct women's and men's choirs and seek to preserve the gendered nature of the ensembles, I have three primary recommendations. First, students are the experts of their own experiences. As such, teachers must consider the musical and social needs and goals of each singer. For trans and gender-expansive singers who may be uncomfortable singing in a gendered ensemble, is there another ensemble they can sing in that aligns more closely with their gender identity, such as a mixed ensemble? If that mixed ensemble is auditioned and the student would not have typically been placed in the auditioned ensemble based on their audition, will you make an exception to meet the needs of your student? If a teacher finds that there is rigidity in the structure of the choir program that does not leave room for students to have agency with relation to their gender identity, then the teacher should reconsider the gendered structure of the choir program.

Second, teachers must consider the context of the entire choral program. For example, if a school has a women's choir but does not have a men's choir, where would a nonbinary singer go who does not sing soprano or alto? If a trans man was uncomfortable singing in the women's choir but sings soprano or alto, would other choices be available to the student? I encourage teachers to talk to students directly about their ensemble interests and to be open and flexible to membership that is not traditional on the basis of gender and voice classification.

Third, any choir that is defined by gender must prioritize making the definition of "woman" and "man" as inclusive of as many identities as possible, and to make that definition as publicly available as possible. This definition must also make space for students who do not identify within the gender binary, such as singers who are genderqueer or agender. For example, a conductor may define membership for a men's choir as follows:

Singers may audition if they are male, genderqueer, transgender, agender, and other gender identities not represented above. Any singer who believes they would benefit from membership in the men's choir is welcome to audition for the choir.

Groups could also include a statement of a commitment to inclusion intersectionality, such as the one provided on the Harvard College Women's Center Website:

Inclusion: We aim to make our programming and space accessible to everyone by intentionally centering, amplifying and uplifting marginalized voices and needs. All Harvard community members are invited to shape our work towards gender equity on campus and beyond, through individual participation and group collaboration.

Intersection: We embrace the differences among people and continue to reflect on the complexities of our multiple and intersecting identities and how these identities impact our work. (Harvard College Women's Center, n.d.)

Finally, although women's choirs have traditionally focused on treble choir music and men's choir repertoire is typically geared toward tenors and basses, any choir that is defined by gender must be open to voice types not typically associated with the ensemble. For example, a men's choir may admit a trans man who is not and does not intend to undergo hormone replacement therapy and sings in the range of a Soprano II. In this situation, some possible changes a conductor could consider include rewriting parts to best meet the range and tessitura of the singer, having the student sing a tenor or bass line up an octave, or writing a descant line for the student to sing as a solo. In a women's choir, a trans woman who sing bass could sing a continuo line (such as the bass line of the piano or the cello line for a piece with obbligato cello), double. Depending on the musical goals of the student, conductors or voice teachers may work one-on-one with the student to develop the students' range to more closely align with the voice part of the ensemble.

Addressing Common Terms Related to Trans and Gender-Expansive People. As I have read about inclusion in gendered spaces, I have come across a number of terms used in what I believe are an attempt to be gender inclusive, particularly in an effort to preserve women's spaces. I discuss some of these terms in detail below to provide context on the words' origins and implications.

***Trans**, *Women*s*, *Womxn*, and *Womyn*.** At one point, Megan specifically offered up the name Women*s choir as a potential alternative title for the LU women's choir. Schools like Princeton University use the asterisk in their Women*s Center to suggest that we are much more than our name implies" and that the center "welcomes and engages all genders, including genderqueer, nonconforming, transgender folks, and cisgender men" (Princeton University Women*s Center, n.d.). On *Blurring the Binary*, a website to support teachers of trans music

students, Melanie Stapleton, the founder and a trans music educator, provided the following context for the origins and use of trans* with an asterisk:

The abbreviation *trans* has occasionally been written with an asterisk after it, trans*, deriving from a wildcard specifier search function in computer programming, as it was an attempt to include individuals who weren't medically transitioning. Recently, the community has moved away from using the asterisk as the word transgender already encompasses all identities, and because the asterisk adds a hyper-focus on the medical aspects of someone's physiology or transition. (Stapleton, 2021, emphasis in original)

Initially, Megan was excited at the prospect of using the asterisk in "women*s choir" as a way to signal gender inclusion, but when she brought it to the head of her university's LGBT resource center, she was told that it would not necessarily be clear to trans and gender-expansive individuals that that was the intention of the asterisk and that there were more effective ways to be active in their allyship.

Some women's spaces have specifically used the alternative spellings "womxn" and "womyn" as a way to remove the word "man." Each of the terms have different origins and meanings. Founded in 1976, the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival was the first time the spelling "womyn" appeared in print. Although the origins of the festival originated in a desire to center women's experiences and exclude men, they adopted policies that required festival attendees to be womyn-born-womyn, thus privileging cisgender women and barring trans women from participating in the festival. The festival formally disbanded in 2015, likely as a result of the transphobic policies (McConnell, Todd, Odahl-Ruan, & Shattell, 2016). Given the term's

history with transphobia and trans-exclusionary radical feminism,⁷ I do not recommend groups use the spelling of “womyn.”

“Womxn” has origins from the 1970s (Scupin, 2012) but became more popular in the 2010s as feminists began to be more intentional with their application of intersectional feminism (Karpinski, 2020). Because feminism has faced criticism for centering whiteness, the use of “womxn” has been applied to specifically counter the racial exclusivity traditionally associated with feminism and to be intentionally inclusive of trans women. Critics have argued, however, that the term “woman” should already include trans women and women of color and thus the term is unnecessary. Although Megan and the women’s choir chose to move away from a gendered ensemble model, one of the names they had considered was “Womxn’s Choir.” Many of the singers, however, were concerned about male assistant conductors not feeling welcome in the ensemble or limiting the opportunity for men to participate in the ensemble down the road.

For conductors seeking to maintain gendered ensembles while being inclusive to trans and gender-expansive singers, the use of the asterisk and other names and spellings can be a creative way to nod to the structures of the past while being more explicit with their inclusion efforts. Like the head of the LGBT resource center at LU, however, believe there are more direct ways that conductors can signal to students that the ensemble is gender-inclusive, including course descriptions and ensemble bios. I will discuss more strategies later this chapter.

Female-to-Male and Male-to-Female. When I first began learning about trans identities, I often heard the terms FTM (female-to-male) and MTF (male-to-female) used to define trans men and women, respectively. Michigan State University’s Gender and Sexuality Campus

⁷ Trans-exclusionary radical feminists (TERFs) are a minority branch of feminism that does not affirm trans women as women and advocate for trans women to be barred from women’s spaces (Smythe, 2018)

Center defined the term as “women who were assigned-male-at-birth” while making the important distinction that:

Some trans women reject this term [MTF] because they have always been male, regardless of sex assignment. This term is considered by some to be outdated and overly focused on medical transition, while others embrace it as an identity term. (The Gender and Sexuality Center, n.d.)

The center provided a similar definition and disclaimer for FTM. I have known teachers who have asked students if they are MTF or FTM without realizing they are asking incredibly personal and sensitive information about a students’ gender identity, history with gender labels, and medical history. The use of terms such as MTF and FTM also privileges an essentialist view of gender and one centered in superficial understandings of biology, rather than focusing on an individual’s identity. If a student does not offer up such information, it is inappropriate for a teacher to ask such questions.

Although the terms MTF and FTM may be considered outdated, there may be singers who continue to use these terms. As is true with all identities, these terms are specific to the individual. If a student uses the terms MTF or FTM, teachers should honor and respect that students’ identity and label.

Female- and Male-Presenting. Some choir programs may use terms such as “female presenting singers” or “male-presenting singers” as a way to define membership. I would caution against such an approach as it plays into social expectations related to gender expression. *Gender expression* is “the way in which someone expresses their gender, either consciously or unconsciously,” which includes elements such as “clothing, hairstyle, body language, manner of speaking, social interactions, and gender roles” (The Gender and Sexuality Campus Center, n.d.).

For teachers seeking to move away from gender stereotypes and expectations, terms such as female- and male-presenting can make assumptions about what women and men are supposed to look like, when in reality, most people have qualities that would traditionally be defined as both feminine and masculine. Additionally, a person's gender expression may not align with their gender identity, or their gender expression may appear to be disconnected from their gender identity. For teachers who conduct gendered ensembles, I encourage them to use terms that center on identity, rather than expression, so as to not put restrictions or expectations on what the choir's membership will look or sound like.

Challenging Assumptions, Stereotypes, and the Status Quo

There are many assumptions and stereotypes related to gender in music education that I have not been able to substantiate with research. Such stereotypes and assumptions include, but are not limited to, the relationship between voice type and gender, ensemble classification and program structure, singers' gender identity, and the idea that having a shared gender identity is equated to having a shared experience based on that identity. At times, traditionally single-gender ensembles embrace these assumptions, such as students learning better in single-gender environments despite the fact that the United States Department of Education (2005) was unable to substantiate such claims. The American Civil Liberties Union (n.d.) argued that success related to single-gender educational settings is largely due to smaller classroom sizes, quality teachers, parent involvement, and proper funding. In music education, studies that point to the benefits of single-gender choral environments include student perspective (Bartolome, 2013; Elorriaga, 2011; Parker, 2018; Ramsey, 2013; Sweet, 2010), but studies that specifically focus on students doing better in single-gender environments are typically from the perspective of the teacher and do not include student voice (Carp, 2004; Dame, 2019). Musicians, students,

researchers, and teachers must interrogate assumptions as part of the necessary steps to determining if the basis of traditionally single-gender choral ensembles are based in reality or if assumptions and stereotypes are used as a rationale for upholding practices and program structures that are inherently exclusive.

Suggestions for Future Research

Although there has been an increase in recent years to study issues related to gender (Dame, 2019; Nannen, 2017; Parker, 2018; Sweet & Parker, 2019; Watson et al., 2019), sexuality (McBride, 2016; Minette, 2018; Paparo & Sweet, 2014; Thomas-Durrell, 2019; Shane, 2020), and centering trans and gender-expansive perspectives (Bartolome, 2016; Garrett & Palkki, 2021; Palkki, 2016; Palkki & Caldwell, 2019; Sauerland, 2018; Silveira, 2019), more research is needed to understand the varied perspectives and experiences of people as it relates to gender and sexuality. An approach that acknowledges the intersectional nature of identity is also necessary in order to expand teachers' understanding of the ways in which various identities influence one another. Studies such as Thomas-Durrell's (2019) dissertation, which explored the intersections of race, sexuality, gender, religion, and geography, are essential in order for music educators to understand the complexities gender and sexual identity and how they intersect with other aspects of an individual's life. Such an approach necessitates centering underrepresented identities in music education, such as those that are not white, cisgender, heterosexual, middle-class, and Christian. An intersectional approach to music research is essential in order to provide a more nuanced approach to music education.

A number of studies exist exploring the culture of women's and treble choirs, but more research is needed to understand the culture of men's and tenor-bass ensembles, particularly in the collegiate and community choir settings. Many studies that explore male singers' identities

focus on middle and high school students (Elorriaga, 2011; Freer, 2009a, 2009b; Ramsey, 2013), but those studies typically center on recruitment efforts in secondary choir programs, and the students' reflections on gender and singing are often related to the social pressures experienced in adolescence, making such studies difficult to apply to collegiate and community choirs. Because I was only able to do a deep-dive with the women's choir as they explored their ensemble's identity as it related to diversity, equity, and inclusion of a variety of gender identities, I did not observe a conductor and students of a men's choir collectively consider inclusion in a men's choir. As such, the body of research considering gender in choral ensembles would benefit a study of a men's choir replicating the experiences of Megan and the LU women's choir.

As conductors and singers in both mixed and traditionally single-gender choral ensembles make changes to their ensembles in an effort to create a more gender-inclusive environment, scholars should also consider studying choir culture, policy, and practice before, during and after the changes are implemented to see if and how those policies contribute to a diverse, equitable, and inclusive choir. Given the scope of this study, I was not able to observe the long-term implications of the changes made by the conductors and singers. A longitudinal study considering the changes in policy and the benefits and drawbacks of such changes could provide teachers with additional insight and considerations as they approach gender inclusion in the ensembles they conduct.

Although the body of research centering on trans and gender-expansive perspectives is growing (Bartolome, 2016; Garrett & Palkki, 2021; Nichols, 2013; Palkki, 2015, 2016, 2020; Silveira, 2019; Sullivan, 2014), more research is needed to better understand the needs of trans and gender-expansive singers in choir programs. Many discussions about trans and gender-

expansive singers continue to perpetuate binary identities as the norm without acknowledging the spectrum of gender identities, thereby reinstating harmful assumptions around gender identity and expression. Teachers and researchers must remember that gender-expansive identities include those who are nonbinary, gender queer, gender fluid, agender, and a number of other identities that do not ascribe to identities predicated on the gender binary. As such, discussions surrounding gender, particularly in men's and women's choirs, must take these perspectives into account to determine how singers outside of the gender binary are impacted by spaces traditionally classified on the basis of gender.

Women's, treble, men's, and tenor-bass ensembles are not the only choral ensembles that are impacted by gender. Conductors of mixed choral ensembles, many of whom are the directors of choral activities at their schools, must interrogate gender and its impact on choral ensembles in the same ways that conductors of traditionally single-gender choral ensembles must. Research is needed to make the connection between gender in choirs not overtly defined by gender (such as mixed choirs, which are typically defined as choirs accepting singers of all voice types). The impacts of gender in choral music are pervasive, and more research is needed to explicitly highlight the impact of gender in mixed ensembles. Such research would support additional strategies for addressing gender in spaces that are not explicitly tailored or presumed to be tailored to particular voice parts or gender identities.

Conclusion

Some conductors may choose to move away from gendered ensemble structures and others may choose to embrace them. Because of the pervasiveness of gender in society, moving away from gendered ensemble structures does not mean that teachers should not acknowledge and discuss the impacts of gender in choral ensembles and in singers' lives. Regardless of the

classification of the ensemble, teachers must remember that gender is a constant in social interactions and is often the basis on which relationships, schools, sports teams, and medical care are defined. Conductors must continually interrogate and evaluate the influence of gender in choral music, which includes facilitating difficult conversations, communicating with singers, and fostering an environment in which singers can voice their needs and raise concerns related to inclusion within the ensemble.

Change may seem small and insignificant in the greater scope of social justice issues. Discussions surrounding diversity, equity, and inclusion can be uncomfortable, stressful, and difficult. Teachers must remember that policies can change, not every policy is set in stone, and that students' experiences and perspectives must be at the heart of every discussion and decision that impacts students' lives. For conductors who are nervous, hesitant, or do not know where to start with inclusion efforts in their ensembles, they will likely find that opening conversations and discussions with students, fellow teachers, community, and alumni can be an illuminating experience. Conductors must prioritize and empower students to make decisions while centering the concerns and needs of minoritized singers. When conductors do, they may come to realize that seemingly small and insignificant changes can have impactful and life-altering changes in the lives of current and future students, colleagues, and community members.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Recruitment Materials – Conductors

Hello,

I am a Ph.D. student in music education at Michigan State University. For my dissertation, I will tell the stories of teacher-conductors leading traditionally single-gender ensembles and how they consider practices and discourses surrounding gender in choral music. You were referred to me as someone that may be interested in exploring these issues in the form of a narrative study.

Your participation would include an estimated 4-6 interviews exploring your choral background, how issues surrounding gender in choir have evolved over time, and how you approach inclusion in traditionally single-gender ensembles. The dissertation seeks to highlight the complexities of gender issues in choral music and incite conversations that consider gender practices and traditions in the choral community.

If you are interested in participating, please answer the following questions:

Name

Pronouns (he/him/his, she/her/hers, they/them/theirs, etc.)

Briefly describe your teaching experience, including your current position (Ages taught, courses taught, number of years taught, school types, choir types, etc.)

What is your experience with single-gender choral ensembles?

If you were to participate in this study, what topics concerning gender in traditionally single-gender choral ensembles would you be most interested in discussing?

What is your general availability and preference for individual interviews?

Is there anything else you would like me to know?

Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to hearing from you.

Jessica McKiernan
Ph.D. Student, Music Education
Graduate Teaching Assistant
Michigan State University

APPENDIX B

Research Participant Consent Form – Conductors

PURPOSE OF RESEARCH

The purpose of this study is to tell the stories of teacher-conductors leading traditionally single-gender ensembles and how they consider practices and discourses surrounding gender in choral music. Research topics include: 1. How teacher-conductors' intra- and interpersonal experiences with gender influence the ways they see and experience gender, and how those experiences influence their choral pedagogy. 2. The discourses surrounding gender in traditionally single-gender choral ensembles, how those discourses are created, and who creates the discourses. 3. Practices teacher-conductors employ to create environments honoring and valuing a variety of gender identities and expressions. 4. The areas in which teacher-conductors feel they succeed and struggle to create environments honoring and valuing a variety of gender identities and expressions.

WHAT YOU WILL BE ASKED TO DO

You will participate in a series of semi-structured interviews. Interviews will center around issues of gender and inclusion in choral ensembles. Although I will have a few prepared questions, what you choose to share will ultimately guide the interviews. At any point, you may skip questions that you prefer to not answer or to stop the interview. The interviews subsequent to the first interview will serve as follow-ups to the first, covering topics that require further clarification and/or addressing new material that you would like to share in addition to addressing events or situations that occurred during classroom observations.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS

You may or may not benefit personally from being in this study. However, we hope that other people may benefit from knowing about your experiences to better inform the ways in which they approach topics of gender and inclusion in traditionally single-gender ensembles.

POTENTIAL RISKS

You will be asked to provide personally identifying information, but all information that you provide will remain confidential. All information gathered will be encrypted and stored on a password-protected external hard drive to which I only have access. In the event of any publication or presentation resulting from the research, no personally identifiable information will be shared. All interviews will be videotaped, which will also be stored on an encrypted and password-protected external hard drive.

PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY

Signed consent forms will be retained for at least three years after completion of the research. Electronic data including video, audio, transcriptions, and journals will be kept on an encrypted hard drive which will be kept in a locked drawer in my personal office when not in use. Data from the study may be used in teaching or presentations in the future, but data will be stripped of personally identifiable information.

YOUR RIGHTS TO PARTICIPATE, SAY NO, OR WITHDRAW

You have the right to say no to participating in the research. You can stop at any time after it has already started. There will be no consequences if you stop.

COST AND COMPENSATION FOR BEING IN THE STUDY

There are no financial costs to participate in this study.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Throughout the study, you may perform member checks to assess the trustworthiness of the data collected and validity of the results reported. You will have access to all resultant publications as well.

CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have concerns or questions about this study, please contact Jessica McKiernan: 345 W. Circle Drive, Room 221, East Lansing, MI 48824; jessica.r.mckiernan@gmail.com; 503.307.6694.

If you have questions or concerns about your role and rights as a research participant, would like to obtain information or offer input, or would like to register a complaint about this study, you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the Michigan State University’s Human Research Protection Program at 517-355-2180, Fax 517-432-4503, or e-mail irb@msu.edu or regular mail at 4000 Collins Rd, Suite 136, Lansing, MI 48910.

DOCUMENTATION OF INFORMED CONSENT

Your signature below means that you voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

Participant’s name (printed)

Signature

Date

I agree to allow audiotaping/videotaping of the interview. (Circle ‘Yes’ or ‘No’)

- Yes
- No _____
Initials

Please keep a copy of this form for your records.

APPENDIX C

Research Participant Consent Form – Students

PURPOSE OF RESEARCH

The purpose of this study is to tell the stories of teacher-conductors leading traditionally single-gender ensembles and how they consider practices and discourses surrounding gender in choral music.

WHAT YOU WILL BE ASKED TO DO

Your participation in this research study would include responding to questionnaires, participating in group discussions, and if you wish, participating in individual or small group interviews. These interviews would be conducted via Zoom and would last 20 - 40 minutes. Your participation would also include observations of your ensemble at times to be determined throughout the semester.

YOUR RIGHTS TO PARTICIPATE, SAY NO, OR WITHDRAW

Participation is voluntary, you may choose not to participate at all, or you may refuse to participate in certain procedures or answer certain questions or discontinue your participation at any time without consequence. You can stop at any time after it has already started. There will be no consequences if you stop and you will not be criticized. You will not lose any benefits that you normally receive.

PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY

Data from the study may be used in research publications, teaching, or presentations in the future, but data will be stripped of personally identifiable information.

CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have concerns or questions about this study, please contact Jessica McKiernan: 345 W. Circle Drive, Room 221, East Lansing, MI 48824; jessica.r.mckiernan@gmail.com; 503.307.6694.

If you have questions or concerns about your role and rights as a research participant, would like to obtain information or offer input, or would like to register a complaint about this study, you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the Michigan State University's Human Research Protection Program at 517-355-2180, Fax 517-432-4503, or e-mail irb@msu.edu or regular mail at 4000 Collins Rd, Suite 136, Lansing, MI 48910.

DOCUMENTATION OF INFORMED CONSENT

Your signature below means that you voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

Participant's name (printed)

Signature

Date

I agree to allow audiotaping/videotaping of the interview.

Yes

No

Initials

Please keep a copy of this form for your records.

APPENDIX D

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol – Conductors (To Be Developed with Participants)

Background

- Personal background and identity
 - Where are you from?
 - What is your gender identity?
 - Other identities (age, race, religion, etc.)
- Tell me about your journey to becoming a collegiate choral conductor
 - What can you tell me about some of your greatest influences during that time?
 - How and when did you know you wanted to pursue music as a career?
- Tell me about your history of singing in and directing traditionally single-gender ensembles.
- How do your experiences with single-gender and mixed choirs differ?
- How have conversations surrounding gender in choirs changed over your career or lifetime?
- What do you see as the purpose of single-gender spaces?
 - Has that changed over time?

Current Job

- Describe the rehearsal environment of the ensemble.
- Describe the social environment of the ensemble.
- What is the culture surrounding gender in your choir? Music department? University? State? Region? Communities in which you are a part of (choirs, social groups, religious groups, etc.).
 - How do your attitudes and beliefs about gender compare to those around you?
 - What policies do you have related to gender in your ensemble? (Membership, voice parts, ensemble bio/description, course description, performance attire, etc.)
 - In what ways do you feel like you have succeeded in creating a choir that is open to a variety of gender identities and expressions?
 - In what ways have you struggled to create a gender-inclusive environment?
- How has gender influenced your personal experience as a conductor?
- How has your history with single-gender ensembles influenced how you approach conducting single-gender ensembles?
 - Do you approach working with mixed ensembles differently?
- How does your gender influence how you work with your choir?
- What is the history of your current single-gender ensemble?
 - What are its traditions?
 - Has your approach to this ensemble differed from previous conductors?
- What do you view as the history and traditions of single-gender choirs? How does that compare to the culture of your choir?
- Do you feel like the tradition of single-gender choirs is changing? What place will they have in the future?
- How do you go about selecting repertoire or your ensembles?
 - What are the criteria you use?

- How do you consider gender and gender stereotypes when selecting repertoire?
- What resources do you use for working with single-gender choirs?
- Do you discuss gender with your choir? If so, in what ways?

APPENDIX E

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol – Students (To Be Developed with Participants)

Tell me about yourself

- Demographic information (age, gender identity, race, field of study, etc.)
- How long have you been singing?
- What sorts of ensembles have you been in?
 - Does this ensemble differ from previous ensembles in which you have sung (in terms of policies, attitudes, gender, etc.)? If so, explain.

How did you become involved in this choir? What did/do you hope to gain by being a part of this choir?

What does being in this choir mean to you?

What does being in a (wo)men's choir mean to you? Is that different than being in a mixed ensemble? If so, explain.

Do you feel like gender is approached differently in the single-gender versus mixed ensembles at your university? In choir in general? If so, please explain.

Tell me about your choir conductor.

- How does your choir conductor influence the nature of this single-gender ensemble?
 - Musical
 - Social
 - Repertoire

Do you know if your ensemble has policies and positions on the following issues? If so, explain:

- Performance attire (Is it determined by gender?)
- Ensemble membership (Voice part? Gender identity?)
- Voice part in relation to gender identity
- Ensemble bio
- Course description
- Description on choir's website

If you are aware of the ensembles policies:

- Do you agree with the policies?
- Which policies do you support?
- Are there any policies that you would be interested in changing?
- Do you have any unsettled or mixed feelings about any of the policies?

If you are not aware of the ensembles policies:

- What kind of policies do you think would be appropriate for your choir to have in regard to things like uniforms, membership, voice parts, etc.?
- Are those policies specific to men's choirs? Tenor/Bass choirs? Any choir?
- Are those policies that take a variety of gender identities into consideration?

APPENDIX F

Outline and Presentation Materials for LU Women's Choir Project

Day 1 – Intro to Study, Anonymous Survey

Presentation:

- Purpose and Background of Study
- Trends in Music Education
 - Addressing trans and gender-expansive singers in choral settings (Palkki, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2020)
 - Female vocal identity (Sweet, 2015, 2016, 2018, 2019)
 - Gender inequities in choral programs (O'Toole, 1998)
 - All-State Choirs changing names and structures (i.e., women's choirs become treble ensembles; men's choirs become tenor-bass ensembles; some states only do mixed choirs)
- Two schools of thought on gender:
 - Essentialist
 - Gender and sex are linked biologically; gender binary (Gülgöz et al., 2019; Smiler & Gelman, 2008; Westbrook & Schilt, 2014)
 - Constructivist
 - Gender is socially constructed; gender exists on a spectrum (Bohan, 1993; Palkki, 2016; Westbrook & Schilt, 2014)
- Definitions
 - Gender: Behaviors, mindsets, visual cues, and physical attributes typically associated on a spectrum of masculinity and femininity (Palkki, 2016)
 - Sex: Traditionally determined on the basis of genitalia, but other contributing factors include hormones, gonads, brain anatomy and function, chromosomes, and more (Westbrook & Schilt, 2014)
 - Gender identity: "How one experiences their gender in their own body and context" (Palkki, 2016, p. 8)
 - Gender binary: The idea that gender exists either as male or female (Westbrook & Schilt, 2014)
 - Gender expression: The ways someone outwardly presents their gender, such as clothing, speech, walk, physical appearance, etc. (Palkki, 2016)
 - Note: for individuals who have not disclosed their gender identity, their gender identity and gender expression may not align
 - Cisgender: when a person's gender identity corresponds with the gender assigned at birth (Palkki, 2016)
 - Gender Dissonance/Incongruence: A feeling that one's assigned gender and experienced gender are not aligned (Westbrook & Schilt, 2014)
 - Note: Gender Dysphoria and Gender Identity Disorder imply and are defined as mental health disorders. As such, trans and gender-expansive rights advocates call for the use of Gender Incongruence, which "does not imply any accompanying mental ill-health" (Heath & Wynne, 2019, p. 2010)

- Transgender: when a person’s identity does not correspond with the gender assigned at birth (Palkki, 2016)
- Nonbinary, gender expansive, genderqueer: a spectrum of gender identities and expressions that are not exclusively feminine or masculine and are outside of a gender binary system
- Intersex: a person who is born with characteristics that are not traditionally thought to be exclusively male or female due to genetic, hormonal, or anatomical differences (Westbrook & Schilt, 2014)
- The Numbers
 - 0.6% of US Adults identify as transgender (1 in every 167 people) (Flores et al., 2016)
 - 61.4% of students report frequently hearing negative remarks about gender expression (GLSEN, 2017)
- Context: Your Choir
 - Ensemble name includes “women”
 - Syllabus says course is open to women and people who identify as women

Anonymous Survey #1 Questions:

- What does singing in the LU Choir mean to you?
- What does being in a women’s choir mean to you?
- Is that different than being in a mixed choir? If so, how?
- Who do you think should be included in the LU women’s choir? What do you think LU women’s choir membership should look like?
 - Is that different than who is in the choir right now? If so, how?
- What are your thoughts on the current gender-specific name of the ensemble with regards to inclusivity?
- Is there anything else you think should be addressed or kept in mind for large-group discussions?
- Do you have any questions, comments, or concerns for me, your peers, or the conductor?

Small Group Discussion:

- What does singing in the women’s choir mean to you?
- What does being in a women’s choir mean to you?
 - Is that different than being in a mixed choir?
- What sort of things should be kept in mind as you explore gender in your women’s choir?

Day 2 – Answering Questions, Continuing Small Group Discussion

Things to consider while discussing sensitive topics:

- Don’t assume gender or sexuality
- This space means different things to different people
- This topic can be very personal
- Opinions can change
- Nothing talked about is set in stone
- The discussion is ongoing

Discussion Guidelines/Suggestions

- Helpful phrases/tools
 - I think...
 - I believe...
 - I feel...
 - Yes.. and (rather than yes... but)
 - I would like to amplify...
- Listen respectfully
- Avoid value judgements
- Ask questions
- 2x2x2 rule
 - Don't talk more than two minutes
 - Wait two seconds after a person talks before you begin speaking
 - Allow at least two people to speak before you speak again

Tasks

- Continue small group discussion from last session
- Bring small group discussion to large group

Day 3: Review Anonymous Surveys, Respond

Tasks

- Read anonymized responses to first survey
- Complete second anonymous Survey

Anonymous Survey #2

- Were there any responses from the first survey that resonated with you?
- Were there any responses from the first survey that you disagree with?
- Were there any responses from the first survey that you hadn't considered?
Is there anything you feel unsettled about?
- Is there anything you would like clarified?
Are you feeling seen and heard in these discussions? If not, what can be done to support you?
- If you feel like your opinions weren't represented today, please share them below so they can get covered next time

Day 4

Tasks

- Conductor/researcher sharing background and positionality with regard to project
- Discussing allyship
- Addressing student questions/comments/concerns
- Group discussion

Student comments/concerns

- Not everyone shares the same opinion
- Gratitude for discussion, even if it is difficult

- Not everyone in group is cisgender or female
- How does this dialogue fit in with men's/TB/mixed choirs?
- Having gender central to the choir's dialogue can be uncomfortable for some
- Students feeling alienated from multiple perspectives
- There are people that would be affected by this that aren't in the ensemble
- Male conductors of women's/treble ensembles
- Can you be inclusive while excluding others?
- Opening up membership to trans and cis men?
- Will there ever be an answer?

Group Discussion on Difficult Conversations

- What is your experience talking about difficult topics?
 - How comfortable are you talking about difficult and sensitive topics?
 - Does your comfort level change depending on the topic?
 - Do you have positive examples of having a difficult conversation?
 - Do you have negative experiences having difficult conversations? Do they shape how you discuss difficult and sensitive topics today?
- In what ways are you good at talking about difficult and sensitive topics?
- In what ways do you struggle with talking about difficult and sensitive topics?

Day 5: Action Items

Tasks

- Continue "difficult conversations" discussion from last class
- Discuss action items for next semester

Items to be specifically addressed next semester:

- Website description and biography of ensemble
- Syllabus
 - General description
 - Specific Objectives
- Course Catalogue
- Repertoire Selection
- Ensemble name

Day 6-8: Workshop

Tasks

- Review project thus far
- Create timeline for finalizing project
- Small/large group brainstorms for various elements of ensemble
 - Vote on changes

Day 9: Reviewing Final Product

Review final project results; Students and teacher share closing thoughts/remarks

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