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Diversity and inclusion within adult amateur singing groups: A literature review

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Abstract

In this article, I aim to draw together and discuss relevant research in order to explore issues of diversity and inclusion within adult amateur group singing and to highlight the need for further research in this area. I suggest that although previous research has generally presented adult amateur singing groups as predominately composed of white, female, well-educated individuals, changes in the popularity and availability of adult singing groups may have increased the diversity of their membership. Drawing on parallel research in other non-music fields, I go on to offer a framework for understanding the processes that support inclusion and to apply this framework to existing research in the field of amateur group singing. I conclude that knowing more about diversity and inclusion within adult amateur group singing is vital to ensuring that groups can respond effectively to the needs of all members of society, and suggest ways to develop a greater understanding of these topics.

Keywords:

diversity, inclusion, singing, amateur music

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A literature review

Issues of diversity and inclusion have rarely been discussed in relation to adult amateur group singing and yet, in other contexts, they have been shown to have a strong influence on the experiences of individual group members, and consequently on participation and retention rates, thus affecting the success of the groups themselves. Although a considerable body of research has focused on diversity and inclusion in other fields, there has been very little specific research investigating how these issues affect individuals and groups within the context of adult amateur group singing.² The increasing popularity of adult group singing (Bartel & Cooper, 2015; Chorus America, 2009; Williams & Keen, 2009) and the variety of forms this now takes suggests that it is time to look afresh at what is known about participation within these groups and the ways in which groups are responding to the increasing diversity of the world around them.

In this article, I have sought to draw together and discuss relevant research in order to examine issues of diversity and inclusion within adult amateur group singing and to highlight the need for further research in this area. After a description of the methodology underpinning this review, I begin by discussing what is understood by the terms ‘diversity’ and ‘inclusion’ and how these terms have been conceptualized and researched. This section also includes a discussion of the relationship between diversity and inclusion, and of the benefits and risks that have been associated with them.

In the next section, I review the literature relating to diversity within adult amateur group singing and consider what is known about the participation of individuals from different cultural and racial backgrounds, as well as how gender, age, education, and ability all affect participation. Finally, I present a framework for understanding the process of inclusion and apply this framework to adult amateur group singing, setting out what research has revealed so far about the ways in which the leadership, practices and climate with adult amateur group singing support or undermine inclusion. Based on this review, I contend that issues of diversity and inclusion have received little specific attention in research into adult amateur group singing to date and propose that understanding more about these issues is vital to the long-term sustainability of adult amateur singing groups and to the wellbeing of those who participate in them.

Methodology

This review is based on a series of searches of literature published in the English language using keywords, synonyms and search phrases, such as “group singing”, “choir”, “inclusion”, “exclusion”, “diversity” and associated words such as “participation”,

² Research into diversity and inclusion within the field of music education has tended to focus on the inclusion of individuals with special needs (e.g. Hyde, Carpenter, & Conway, 2014; Jellison, 2012) and there is little that considers wider aspects of inclusion.

“belonging” and “community”. These terms were used to search various online databases of sources accessible through the University of London’s Library Services as well as databases such as ProQuest’s Music Periodicals Database, and specific journals such as the *International Journal of Community Music*. The results were then supplemented by a process of backwards and forwards searching (vom Brocke et al., 2009), involving reviewing references listed in the sources and additional sources that had cited the articles in order to identify further relevant material.

Drawing from both academic and grey literature, and spanning qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods studies as well as conceptual papers, the sources identified were then categorized according to their relevance to the topics of diversity, inclusion, and adult amateur group singing as well as by date, methodology, and source type. Literature that addressed the key topics of diversity and inclusion and that focused specifically on adult amateur singing groups was prioritized. However, due to the lack of studies that met these criteria, I also included relevant research pertaining to singing more generally as well as research carried out within educational settings where these brought additional insights to the review.

The lack of specific research, and particularly of conceptual thinking, relating to diversity and inclusion in relation to adult group singing meant that I turned to research on diversity and inclusion that had been carried out in other organizational settings such as the workplace, where these topics had been more comprehensively explored and discussed. The literature that emerged through these searches also helped me to identify new searches, such as the role of leadership and group processes in facilitating diversity and inclusion, that could then be applied to the context of adult amateur group singing. Although organizational research might not immediately appear relevant to adult amateur group singing, this link has previously been made in studies of adult singing groups (Kramer, 2011; Meisenbach & Kramer, 2014) where the singing groups have been understood as voluntary leisure organizations. Furthermore, there are fundamental communalities between workplace organizations and singing groups as both involve bringing groups of people together to perform tasks and relate to one another as part of a team (Kirrane, O’Connor, Dunne, & Moriarty, 2016). Moreover, turning to literature on diversity and inclusion within the workplace allowed me to explore the theoretical underpinnings of these concepts and identify a framework that could then be applied to adult amateur group singing.

Once the literature had been categorized, relevance to the key topics remained my principal criteria for inclusion in this review. However, wherever possible, I sought to draw on research that had been published in peer-reviewed journals, as recommended by Rowley and Slack (2004) and within a timespan of the last ten years (2007 – 2017), although exceptions were made when the contribution from an older study, book or thesis was particularly relevant.

Understanding diversity and inclusion

As this article will show, issues of diversity and inclusion have, to date, received little attention within the context of adult amateur group singing. However, an increasing recognition of the importance of these issues to successful organizational management and their relationship to fundamental issues of social justice (Mor Barak, Findler, & Wind, 2003) has resulted in considerable work to explore and conceptualize these topics in research related to the workplace (see, for example, Ferdman, 2014; Jansen, Otten, van der Zee, & Jans, 2014). Although some would argue that, particularly in relation to inclusion, scholarship is still in the initial stages (Shore, Cleveland, & Sanchez, 2017), this literature provides a basis for understanding how these concepts have been defined and how they affect both organizational performance and individual wellbeing.

Defining diversity

The concept of diversity has been evolving over the last few decades “into a rather amorphous field, where the very word itself invokes a variety of different meanings and emotional responses” (Anand & Winters, 2008, p. 356). Where diversity was once simply seen as the way in which individuals are alike or different from one another in demographic terms (McGrath, Berdahl, & Arrow, 1995), diversity is now understood as a far more complex issue. In their discussion of diversity and inclusion practice, Hays-Thomas and Bendick (2013) define diversity as “the mixture of attributes within a workforce that in significant ways affect how people think, feel, and behave at work, and their acceptance, work performance, satisfaction, or progress in the organization” (p. 195). This definition gives a sense of the way in which diversity may be understood at different levels, both external and internal, and may be defined differently according to its context (Ospina & Wagner, 2001).

Bell and Hartmann (2007) draw attention to the way in which much of the current discourse around diversity rests on a white normative perspective which “starts from the dominance of white worldviews, and sees the culture, experiences, and indeed lives, of people of color only as they relate to or interact with the white world” (p. 907). Consequently, some researchers argue that definitions of diversity should take account of the complex ways in which diversity is predicated on social relations such as race, class, gender, sexuality and ability (Yerichuk, 2015).

Defining inclusion

Similarly, the conceptual underpinnings of inclusion are still evolving (Shore, Randel, Chung, & Dean, 2011) and it would seem that there is no one agreed definition of the concept. Some see inclusion as a process whereby individuals become accepted as members of an organization, where inclusion is established by “the degree to which an employee is accepted and treated as an insider by others in a work system” (Pelled, Ledford,

& Mohrman, 1999, p. 1014) as well as by “the meaningful participation of diverse groups in organizational, community, or societal affairs” (Patel, Tabb, & Sue, 2017, p. 262).

Others place the focus on individuals’ perceptions of inclusion and see inclusion occurring “when individuals feel a sense of belonging” (Lirio, Lee, Williams, Haugen, & Kossek, 2008, p. 444), suggesting that inclusion is evidenced by the extent to which individuals perceive themselves to be part of an organization. Taking this definition one step further, Shore, Randel, Chung and Dean (2011) describe inclusion as the degree to which an individual feels they are a valued member of a group through experiencing “treatment that satisfies his or her needs for belongingness and uniqueness” (p. 1265). In so doing, they set out a theory of inclusion in which they propose that uniqueness, where individuals feels valued and accepted for who they are, and belongingness, where individuals feel part of a group, work together to create a sense of inclusion.

The relationship between diversity and inclusion

Diversity and inclusion are often portrayed as closely interrelated concepts and the terms sometimes used interchangeably. However, they are separate and distinct constructs and, as previous research has shown, inclusive organizations and diverse organizations do not necessarily have the same attributes (Roberson, 2006). The relationship between the two concepts has been succinctly explained by Tapia (2009), who states, “Diversity is the mix. Inclusion is making the mix work” (p. 12).

At the same time, a lack of diversity is a symptom of a lack of inclusion (Bendick, 2008); research has shown that those who belong to the “mainstream” are far more likely to feel included in organizations than individuals with diversity characteristics (Mor Barak & Levin, 2002). The concept of exclusion, therefore, connects diversity and inclusion because it reveals how perceptions of inclusion are determined by social identity (Cho & Mor Barak, 2008). However, although some portray inclusion as the “invisible other side of the coin” to exclusion (Dobusch, 2014), others see the relationship not as a binary concept but as “a sort of sliding scale...so that inclusion and exclusion are the extreme poles of a continuum of relations of inclusion/exclusion” (O’Reilly, 2005, p. 85). This perspective is helpful in revealing how individuals can be simultaneously included and excluded to different degrees and in different ways (Ferdman, 2017).

The benefits and risks associated with diversity and inclusion

The benefits and risks of diversity and inclusion have been discussed by many scholars and researchers. On the one hand, a number of studies of social behaviour have shown that inclusion can lead to increased trust (Hillebrandt, Sebastian, & Blakemore, 2011) and pro-social behavior (DeWall, Twenge, Busman, Im, & Williams, 2010), with consequent benefits to individual health and wellbeing (Begen & Turner-Cobb, 2015). In the workplace, research has demonstrated the benefits of inclusion to employees’ wellbeing (Mor Barak

& Levin, 2002) and job satisfaction (Acquavita, Pittman, Gibbons, & Castellanos-Brown, 2009).

Alongside the individual benefits associated with inclusion, diversity and inclusion have increasingly been recognized as critical factors in the effectiveness of organizations (e.g. Cho & Mor Barak, 2008; Patel, Tabb, & Sue, 2017). For example, some researchers have shown the benefits to organizational performance in terms of employees showing increased commitment and improved performance (Cho & Mor Barak, 2008; Findler, Wind & Mor Barak, 2007) as well as in reducing conflict within organizations (Nishii, 2013). Bringing together individuals with a range of different strengths and perspectives can also help organizations to achieve greater success through enhancing creativity (Cox, 2001; Stevens, Plaut, & Sanchez-Burks, 2008), reducing turnover (Nishii & Mayer, 2009) and increasing citizenship behavior (Den Hartog, De Hoogh, & Keegan, 2007).

Nonetheless, some researchers have also suggested that increased diversity and inclusion can have a negative impact. For example, in a mega-analytic review of research related to workplace diversity, Joshi and Roh (2009) found that diversity in groups could increase the probability of conflict and communication problems, while others have reported decreases in social integration, and inhibition of decision-making and change processes (see Mannix & Neale, 2005 for a review). Meanwhile, others have suggested that a focus on inclusion fails to take account of power relations and conflict (Dobusch, 2014)

Diversity and inclusion within adult amateur group singing

Focusing on diversity and inclusion in the context of adult amateur group singing places a spotlight on the participation and experiences of individuals within adult amateur singing groups as well as on the processes by which such groups are organized. In this next section, I aim to take account of the ways in which diversity and inclusion have been defined and apply this to the literature related to adult amateur group singing.

Diversity within adult amateur group singing

Adult amateur group singing is generally seen as a popular leisure activity in Western cultures, particularly in the United States (Chorus America, 2009; Williams & Keen, 2009) and Europe (Bartel & Cooper, 2015). Analysis of a national survey carried out with 35,735 U.S. adults in 2012 revealed that around three percent of respondents had sung in a choral group, choir or glee club in the previous year, and nearly seven percent had ‘sung with others’ (National Endowment for the Arts, 2015). In Europe, Bartel and Cooper (2015) report that adult singers represent nearly five percent of the adult population. However, they suggest that group singing is more informal than other art forms, making it harder to quantify and its value to society less immediately obvious.

Some also suggest that the way in which people engage in group singing has changed, citing a rise in ‘community choirs’ as inclusive, accessible singing groups for the general

public (Adler, 2013; Deane et al., 2013; Yerichuk, 2015). However, the evidence of this is contradictory, with the report produced by the National Endowment for the Arts (2015) citing a two percent decrease since 2008 in the number of people taking part in group singing in the U.S., while Bartel and Cooper suggest that the number of singers in Europe has almost doubled in recent years. Moreover, understanding participation within adult amateur group singing involves asking not just how many people take part in adult group singing but what is known about the diversity of those who do and do not take part.

Culture. There is considerable evidence from existing research into adult amateur group singing that cultural barriers affect participation in group singing. Some even suggest that *not singing* has become the norm in Western, affluent societies (Joyce, 2005; Knight, 2016; Richards & Durrant, 2003; Welch, 2016). Others have argued that music education has tended to focus on Western classical music, thereby excluding people with other cultural backgrounds (Horne, 2007; Pascale, 2005). As a result, some suggest that an elitist culture of musicality has developed that prevents large numbers of people from participating in adult amateur group singing (de Quadros, 2015; Joyce, 2005). This argument is reinforced by Hallam, Creech, Varvarigou, and McQueen (2012) who highlight the theme of musical elitism in their study of music-making amongst older people and suggest there is a lack of research exploring the barriers faced by those who wish to take part in music-making.

Singing ability. Other researchers have focused on the way in which group singing is an activity that excludes individuals who believe themselves to be unable to sing (Demorest, Kelley, & Pfordresher, 2016; Knight, 2016; Numminen, Lonka, Pauliina, & Ruismäki, 2015; Whidden, 2009). Although it is difficult to establish how many people this affects, research carried out among students at the University of Texas revealed that almost 60% reported they could not accurately imitate melodies (Pfordresher & Brown, 2007). However, systematic assessments of singing ability in the general population have shown that around 85 – 90% of the general population can sing in tune (for a review, see Dalla Bella, Berkowska, & Sowin, 2011) although a lack of standard procedures for determining poor pitch singing may influence the accuracy of this statistic (Loui, Demorest, Pfordresher, & Iyer, 2015). Nonetheless, this finding suggests that a substantial number of people may exclude themselves from group singing due to a perceived inability to sing in tune, something that, in any case, can be nurtured with appropriate support (Welch, 2009).

Gender. Researchers have generally reported that women outnumber men by two to one in adult amateur singing groups (Bartel & Cooper, 2015; Clift, Hancox, Morrison, et al., 2008; Parkinson, 2016; National Endowment for the Arts, 2015). This gender imbalance is generally attributed to the gendering of vocal music education, in which boys are discouraged from participating in ‘female’ pursuits like singing (Harrison, 2007; Legg, 2013) as well as to vocal changes in puberty, that result in negative perceptions of singing among young men (see, for example, Ashley, 2010; Freer, 2010; Harrison, Welch,

& Adler, 2012). More recently, researchers have sought to raise awareness of transgender singers and the barriers they face (Manternach, 2017; Rastin, 2016), highlighting a need for a greater understanding of “the rapidly changing gender landscape of the twenty-first century” (Palkki, 2017, p. 22) and how gender issues affect adult group singing.

Race and ethnicity. Equally, few researchers have paid much attention to the racial and ethnic background of individuals participating in adult amateur group singing. Although Bell (2004) and Rensink-Hoff (2011) both report that some previous studies have revealed little racial and ethnic diversity in the membership of singing groups, Bell notes that many studies had not examined singers’ racial or ethnic backgrounds. Furthermore, she suggests that researchers had also not sought to access existing groups of racially and ethnically diverse singers. Support for Bell’s theory can be found in The National Endowment for the Arts’ report (2015) which reveals that nearly a third of the respondents who took part in group singing were from African American or Hispanic backgrounds. Although the survey on which this report is based does not distinguish between amateur and professional group singing, this finding is, nonetheless, significant as it indicates that, in the U.S. at least, participation in adult group singing may be far more racially and ethnically diverse than has previously been recognized. Meanwhile, the most in-depth discussion of diversity within an adult singing group is provided by Yerichuk (2015), whose survey of members of a community choir in Canada revealed that, despite initially reporting very little ethno-cultural diversity, open questions allowed singers to describe “complex and nuanced” ethno-cultural backgrounds that indicated “diversity along multiple axes, such as religious affiliation, nationality, parental immigration and ethnic ancestry” (p. 226). Yerichuk, therefore, calls for further research to explore the “complex questions of how cultural diversity is defined, enacted, and even who is defining the terms of inclusion within community choirs” (p. 228). It is, therefore, important that in the future, researchers should not only take account of race and ethnicity in reporting on singers’ characteristics but should seek to include groups that are representative of different racial and ethnic communities.

Education. The literature relating to the educational background of the members of adult amateur singing groups appears to be relatively consistent, in that singers are largely reported to be well-educated (Bell, 2004; Chorus America, 2003; Rensink-Hoff, 2011). This trend appears to be reflected in the National Endowment for the Arts’ report (2015), which shows that almost three-quarters (73%) of those taking part in group singing had a college education compared to just over half (55%) of the general U.S. population.

However, the findings from smaller-scale studies have led some researchers to report a more diverse educational background among singers in the groups they studied. For example, in a study of a community choir in Scotland, Hillman (2002) found that only a minority of the members had continued their education beyond the age of eighteen, while a survey of the members of two Norwegian hospital choirs also revealed higher participation among people who were not university-educated (Vaag, Saksvik, Theorell,

Skillingstad, & Bjerkeset, 2012). As such, it may be that some singing groups have greater diversity in terms of singers' educational backgrounds than has been generally reported.

Age. Researchers have generally reported that most members of adult amateur singing groups are aged over 40 (Bell, 2004; Chorus America, 2003; Clift et al., 2008). Nonetheless, some researchers have suggested that more younger people are taking part in group singing. Bell (2008) reports anecdotal evidence of choirs with a young, diverse membership and this appears to be further borne out in the report produced by the National Endowment for Arts (2015) which states that 17% of singers were aged between 18 and 24, compared to 13% in the general population of US adults. Equally, Bartel and Cooper (2015) claim that the average age of singers in their research was younger than that of the general population in Europe.

Health issues and disability. It seems that there has been very little research into the participation of adults with health issues and disabilities within adult amateur group singing. Although some studies have focused on singing groups for people with mental or physical health issues or disabilities (e.g. Clift, Manship, & Stephens, 2017; Fancourt et al., 2016; Hassan, 2017), a literature review (Salvador, 2013) reveals very little specific investigation of the topic as a whole, leading Salvador to conclude that “most school and community choirs are populated primarily by students with typical physical, cognitive and behavioural abilities” (p. 37). Moreover, since this review, there appears to have been little new research exploring the participation of individuals with disabilities within adult group singing, although Baker and Green (2016) have investigated the experiences of people with visual impairment within adult music-making in the U.K. In a study of individuals involved in community arts and sports organizations (Fujimoto, Rentschler, Le, Edwards, & Härtel, 2014), the researchers conclude that the inclusion of people with disabilities and other minorities within community activities is a topic that requires greater attention, thus highlighting the need for more research in this area.

Marginalized groups. Some studies have shown how the creation of social bonds through group singing is particularly vital for members of marginalized groups. Interviews with black students in a university gospel choir in the U.S., for example, revealed how members felt they had become part of a supportive “family-like” community (Strayhorn, 2011, p.146), while in a case study of a Norwegian choir, the singing group was seen to serve as family for newly arrived immigrants (Schuff, 2014). Equally, interviews with homeless participants in singing groups in Canada (Bailey & Davidson, 2005), with Bosnian refugees in a community choir in Australia (Southcott & Joseph, 2010), and with LGBT individuals in a men's chorus in the U.S. (Moy, 2015) have all shown how a singing group can replace lost family for singers. By bringing together disparate individuals to support each other and co-operate musically, singing groups can, therefore, establish a strong sense of collective

community identity (Lamont et al., 2018).

Inclusion within adult group singing.

Recognizing that diversity within adult amateur group singing appears to be both more complex and less well-understood than it might initially appear, I turn now to issues of inclusion within adult amateur group singing in order to review what is known about how the ways in which singing groups promote or impede inclusion. In so doing, I draw upon the framework of inclusion developed by Shore et al. (2011) in which they propose that inclusive leadership, inclusive practices and an inclusive climate are key contextual factors in enabling individuals to experience a sense of inclusion.

Inclusive leadership. Considering the role that leadership plays in creating or impeding inclusion is, then, a good starting point for viewing the topic of inclusion in relation to group singing. However, the leadership of adult amateur singing groups, other than in a musical sense, is not necessarily well-understood (Jansson, 2013). Although some researchers have described how some singing groups operate with organizational structures comparable to those of voluntary sector organizations (Rowold & Rohmann, 2009), most research into the leadership of adult singing groups focuses on the conductor as group leader. As a result, the strong influence of the conductor on singers' experiences has been widely reported (e.g. Brown, 2012; Durrant, 2005; Jansson, 2015; Rowold & Rohmann, 2009). Most portray this influence as a positive factor in singers' motivation and on-going engagement and Brown even suggests that the behavior and attitude of the conductor is a stronger influence on participation than either musical or social factors.

Some researchers have also shown how a conductor's behavior can damage participants' experiences of group singing (Bonshor, 2017; Kreutz & Brünger, 2012; O'Toole, 2005; Sweet, 2014). Indeed, Bonshor (2017) cites the experiences of several singers who left the group after having been singled out for criticism by the conductor. Others suggest that the position occupied by the conductor as the head of a hierarchical system can result in a lack of individual fulfilment for singers and, ultimately, can result in disengagement from singing (Hess, 2012; Toole, 2005). Highlighting the pivotal role of the conductor, Silber (2005) sees the relationship between the conductor and the group as one of the fundamental processes involved in making music, describing how singers have to accept the conductor's authority and adhere to their rules.

Other researchers have recognized the holistic nature of choral conducting, noting that "singing has a strong social function as well as a musical function" (Durrant, 2005, p. 92) and emphasizing the importance of the "nurturing qualities" of the conductor (Judd & Pooley, 2014, p. 281). They have described the way in which conductors can facilitate a supportive environment by fostering rapport and establishing communication that is based on mutual respect (Bonshor, 2017) or by using humor to "glue a group of people together across their differences and through challenging times" (Kelly, 2015, p. 3). Indeed, Brewer

and Garnett (2012) encourage conductors to “factor in their own impact on the singers as they consider how to balance the collective needs and responsibilities with the individual ones” (p. 256), urging conductors to recognize the value of the social dimensions of their group’s activity.

However, there has been little investigation into the social aspect of the conductor’s role, particularly from singers’ perspectives, or looking more specifically at the ways in which conductors are responding to issues of diversity and inclusion. In addition, there does not appear to have been any research into the way in which other leaders, such as the members of groups’ management committees or informal leaders within the group, are responding to these issues. Indeed, Bonshor (2016) and Einarsdottir (2014) both highlight the role that stronger singers play as ‘team leaders’ within their groups. Understanding more about the role that these other leaders play within adult singing groups is, therefore, important as the responsibility for addressing barriers to inclusion cannot rest solely with the conductor; others with influence over their groups must also share this responsibility.

Inclusive practices. Turning to group practices, there appears to be very little research to be found that looks at the way in which practices enacted within singing groups affect diversity and inclusion. Indeed, there appears to be a general lack of research investigating the social and organizational practices of singing groups. Nonetheless, some studies have shown how group practices can create barriers to inclusion. Researchers such as de Quadros (2015) and O’Toole (2005) describe how singers can feel alienated by the choice of repertoire, while Bell (2008) highlights the impact of admission procedures such as auditions. Meanwhile, Garnett (2005) sees expectations around musical literacy, diction and rules around group behavior as ways to “privilege the white, educated middle classes” (p. 268), creating boundaries that exclude those who do not fit this model. On the other hand, some researchers have identified group practices that would seem to support inclusion. For example, Kelly (2015) describes the importance for members of “making time for being—rather than singing” (p. 3), such as through sharing refreshments. Similarly, Sharlow (2006) highlights the value of social activities such as retreats, games, and other celebratory events, in establishing a sense of community within singing groups.

The findings from these studies indicate that there are both formal and informal practices taking place within adult singing groups that affect members’ sense of inclusion, but it seems that only a few researchers have considered group practices in the specific context of inclusion. Drawing from research within the field of music education, Salvador (2013) identifies specific practices for including individuals with different physical and cognitive abilities, such as allowing singers to remain seated in rehearsals, giving singers the opportunity to learn music at home in advance of rehearsals, enlarging scores, recording rehearsals, and using buddies to help with social or academic difficulties (p. 43). Equally, offering concessionary membership rates can reduce economic barriers to participation while an active commitment to inclusion, such as through providing childcare, taking

account of different faiths when scheduling events, and performing in venues that are accessible for people of all abilities, can serve to “remove barriers to participation and address inequities related to class, gender, ability, sexual orientation, or other differences” (Yerichuk, 2011, p. 3). Meanwhile, Bonshor (2016) and Hess (2012) both suggest that democratic group processes contribute to an inclusive climate by enabling singers to share power, responsibility and knowledge.

Outside of these studies, it seems that little attention has been paid to understanding how the processes involved in managing adult singing groups can enable group members to feel included. However, in the workplace, research findings have shown that “creating and maintaining an inclusive culture is a complex and ongoing process that requires continuous self-examination and thoughtful reflection by leaders and all members of the organization” (Wasserman, Gallegos, & Ferdman, 2008, p. 11). Moreover, writing in *Chorus America’s* journal, Menehan (2009) has highlighted the legal implications for singing groups in the U.S. of failing to take account of the needs of singers with disabilities. Actively managing issues related to inclusion is, therefore, likely to be of increasing importance in the context of adult amateur group singing.

Inclusive climate. It is important to consider what evidence can be found of an inclusive climate within the context of adult amateur group singing, in which “both minority and majority members feel that they belong and feel respected” (Shore et al., 2011, p. 1277). Certainly, there is no lack of evidence concerning the potential of adult group singing to engender a sense of belonging (e.g. Clift, Manship, & Stephens, 2017; Davidson & Faulkner, 2006; Judd & Pooley, 2014; Tarrant et al., 2016), and some researchers have even suggested that singing groups may be more effective and quicker than other leisure activities in establishing social bonds between members (Pearce, Launay, & Dunbar, 2015; Stewart & Lonsdale, 2016).

Nonetheless, some researchers have highlighted instances where individuals are excluded by the discriminatory behavior of other group members. In a study of gender and race identity within women’s vocal ensembles in the U.S., Boerger (2000) describes situations where white members ignored their African American counterparts or behaved in ways that made them feel unwelcome. Boerger argues that this kind of behavior creates “white spaces” where the privileged behaviors and perceptions of white members form an invisible barrier to integration.

Other researchers have also revealed how the behaviour of individuals or even of the group itself can lead singers to disengage. For example, in a qualitative study of an LGBT choir in Australia, Leske (2016) describes how individuals joining the group could experience a sense of exclusion, resulting from an “initial sense of a clique within the choir” (p. 10). Leske’s study is particularly poignant in revealing how, for some, the choir was a “site of safety, asylum, inclusion, activism, wellbeing, and healing” but, for others, it could be experienced as “a site of judgment and exclusion” (p. 1). Meanwhile, respondents to an

online survey carried out with members of Military Wives Choirs in England reported that ‘internal politics’, such as other members’ attitudes and behaviors, had led some individuals to consider leaving the choir (Clift, Page, Daykin, & Peasgood, 2016). Similarly, in a large-scale survey of singers’ experiences in German choirs, interactions with other choir members had led over a third of respondents to report negative experiences of singing, to the extent that some had left or had considered leaving the choir (Kreutz & Brünger, 2012). Equally, people may feel they no longer want to belong to the group if the culture of the group changes, as revealed in Coffin’s study of a women’s barbershop group in Canada (2004) and in Jansson’s interviews with Norwegian choral singers (2013). A greater understanding of these tensions is, therefore, important as it underpins the long-term survival of adult singing groups in enabling groups to learn from conflict and establish good practice (Kreutz & Brünger, 2012).

However, there is little to be drawn from previous research that reveals how singing groups can create an inclusive climate in which their members feel respected and valued as individuals. This gap in the research may be partly because the essence of group singing involves creating a blended sound in which individual voices do not stand out, and where, ultimately, members disappear into the group (Wharton Conkling, 2000). Nonetheless, some studies have revealed how important feeling recognized and valued is for the members of singing groups. Hess (2012), for example, describes moments in her own experiences of choral singing “where I was not seen as part of a monolithic identity... moments where the conductor encouraged laughter and camaraderie... where the conductor honoured my musicianship” (p. 38). Similarly, in an account of the development of a choral outreach program in the U.S, Sweet describes how a conductor had made her feel valued; “I was no longer just one anonymous voice among many—my voice and point of view mattered” (Romey, Sweet, & Wanyama, 2009, p. 83).

Recognition from peers can also be important in enabling singers to feel respected and valued by the group. In his interviews and focus groups with choral singers in England, Bonshor (2016) found that positive feedback from peers could act as “confirmation of the singer’s integration into the choral ‘team’ or ‘community’” (p. 297). The value of peer recognition was also revealed in interviews with singers and conductors conducted as part of a qualitative investigation of the impact of music on singers’ lives (Krallmann, 2016) where singers described how positive feedback from others helped them to feel valued.

Some researchers have also suggested that a sense of safety within the group is fundamental to fostering a collective identity (Tonneijck, Kinébanian, & Josephsson, 2008; Willingham, 2005; Yerichuk, 2010) that, consequently, needs to provide a non-judgemental and supportive environment, particularly for those who have experienced adverse life events (von Lob, Camic, & Clift, 2010) or who face prejudice and discrimination in their lives (Leske, 2016; Palkki & Caldwell, 2018). However, further research into singers’ experiences of inclusion would be valuable in providing greater insight into the ways in which singers feel they belong in their groups and the factors that engender or impede this.

Conclusion

This review has highlighted the need for a greater understanding of diversity and inclusion within adult amateur group singing. In particular, it has shown how current research into diversity within adult group singing is limited. Given the increasing popularity of adult amateur singing, not enough is known about how diverse these groups are, particularly in terms of the multiple factors that represent diversity, or how diversity varies across different types of group.

Furthermore, this review has shown how diversity characteristics such as age, gender, race, ethnicity, and ability/disability are particularly relevant characteristics in the context of adult group singing and can help to specify the dimensions of future research in this area. A survey of different types of adult singing groups could, therefore, bring greater insight into the diversity of these groups and reveal more about the ways in which group practices contribute to or impede diversity within their membership. In addition, such research could help to shed light on the operational and social practices that operate within adult amateur singing groups and would contribute to a greater understanding of how groups can effectively create an inclusive climate.

Drawing from research conducted in the workplace, this review has identified a framework for investigating inclusion within adult amateur group singing that focuses on understanding how leadership, group practices and climate can all contribute to inclusion. Applying this framework to existing research in adult singing has, however, shown that relatively little is known about how the leadership and practices of singing groups can create a climate of inclusion for both minority and majority members, where all individuals feel a sense of belonging and of being valued, or the extent to which group members report a climate of inclusion within their groups.

At the same time, using this framework has revealed the importance of understanding more about how leadership operates within singing groups and of how groups can develop operational and social practices that support inclusion. Further research into the participation and experiences of individuals within adult amateur singing groups, and particularly of individuals who feel they are under-represented within these groups, would, therefore, be helpful in understanding the extent to which adult singing groups are managing to be inclusive and diverse. For example, in-depth qualitative research within individual groups could investigate the lived experiences of group members, the extent to which they feel they are participating in a diverse and inclusive group and the factors that contribute to or impede this. Such research could take the form of case studies of individual singing groups that would provide an opportunity to study issues of diversity and inclusion from a range of different perspectives (such as including those of the conductor, management committee members and individual singers) or could involve a cross-sectional study across different types of adult amateur singing groups. This research would also be helpful in investigating potentially excluding practices that do not appear to have been addressed by researchers.

In addition, further research into diversity and inclusion within adult amateur group

singing would serve to test out the relevance of the framework that has been suggested in this review to non-workplace settings, as it may be that the framework needs further refinement in different contexts. At the same time, research may also serve to raise awareness of the extent to which different groups are being included or excluded from adult group singing and to challenge singing groups to consider their practice in relation to the rights of all individuals to equality of access and treatment.

Ultimately, this review has shown that relatively little attention has been paid to issues of diversity and inclusion within adult amateur group singing. Perhaps the lack of research and debate is a sign of discomfort; in the workplace, Chugh and Brief (2008) suggest that some researchers perceive research on diversity and inclusion to be “touchy,” “difficult,” “unimportant,” and “abstract.” (p. 4). However, group singing is about bringing people together and uniting them in a communal act of music-making. Although some researchers have argued that many of the practices associated with adult group singing are exclusionary, and this may indeed be true in some contexts, it may simply be that not enough is known about the group practices, norms and experiences of participants across the spectrum of adult amateur group singing. In a sense, exploring diversity and inclusion can be seen to touch on issues of social justice, in that adult amateur group singing should be a community resource that all individuals feel able to access. Knowing more about who feels included and who does not, and why, is, therefore, crucial to understanding more about the processes that underpin adult amateur singing groups and that, ultimately, support the long-term sustainability of these groups and the wellbeing of those who take part in them.

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