Key Changes:
Choral Directors' Experiences with
Gender-Inclusive Teaching

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Abstract

As adolescent gender identity has expanded to encompass non-binary forms of gender identity in contemporary social contexts, scholars in music education have begun to examine the music learning experiences of transgender students and the role of the music teacher in fostering an environment that is affirming to gender-diversity. Anecdotal observations of choral music practices in schools in the United States have indicated some changes occurring in the naming of ensembles, the categories used to describe voicing of choral music, the gender terminology used by choral directors during instruction, and program policies and procedures. The purpose of this study was to examine school choral directors' experiences with gender-inclusive instructional practices and their level of confidence in teaching transgender students. A survey consisting of 39 items including questions regarding experience teaching singers who identify as transgender, gender-inclusive instructional practices, and level of confidence in teaching students who identify as transgender was developed for this study. Participants were choral directors ($N = 227$) with experience teaching in secondary schools in the United States. Results indicated that a majority of participants currently engaged in gender-inclusive teaching practices and had moderate confidence in the use of these approaches. Participants reported high confidence in the use of gender-inclusive language and low confidence regarding the impact of medical and non-medical interventions on the singing voice. Results also revealed that choral directors who engaged in formal training experiences reported higher levels of confidence in their ability to teach a singer who identified as transgender.

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The number of students in schools who openly identify as transgender is on the rise (Kosciw et al., 2018). Researchers in 2017 estimated that there were more than 300,000 students who identified as transgender in schools in the United States (Johns, et al., 2019). Many lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) youth have endured harassment and rejection as they seek to define and express their personal identity with authenticity (Blaise, 2005; Kosciw et al., 2016; Koza, 1994; Nixon, 2010; Roulston & Misawa, 2011; Singh & Jackson, 2012; Trollinger, 1993). As concerns have emerged, researchers have begun to explore how schools might better serve LGBTQ youth (Airton et al., 2016). Much of this inquiry highlights the central role of the teacher in creating a safe, positive, and impactful learning environment for sexual and gender-diverse students (Airton et al., 2016; Howard, 2016).

Gender is a significant factor in the growth, development, and education of adolescents (Bandura, 1977, 2001; Brill & Kenney, 2016; Brill & Pepper, 2008; Canevello, 2016; Kohlberg, 1966). Stereotypes and societal norms related to gender are deeply ingrained in schools (Blaise, 2005; Koza, 1994; Trollinger, 1993). As students who identify as transgender have become more open about their gender identity over time, discrimination and harassment toward these students have been noted in schools (Kosciw et al., 2016; Nixon, 2010). Researchers have found that transgender students have, over time, experienced increased victimization and are at greater risk for self-harm or suicide (Brill & Kenney, 2016; McGuire et al., 2010; Nichols, 2012). For many transgender youth, the complex developmental progression of adolescence is further complicated by coming out, name and pronoun changes, pressure to pass (appearance matches gender identity), developing a network of support, and navigating gender-segregated spaces (Erickson-Schroth, 2014). Kosciw et al. (2016) linked risk factors associated with transgender youth to disparities in their educational outcomes. The authors found that students who identified as transgender had increased absences, lower achievement, and were less likely to attend college than their peers (Kosciw et al., 2016). The social and emotional vulnerabilities and barriers to educational equity that many gender-diverse students experience has illuminated the need for a careful examination of how teachers and schools address gender-inclusivity.

As adolescent gender identity has expanded to encompass non-binary forms of gender identity in contemporary social contexts, scholars in music education have begun to examine the music learning experiences of transgender students and the role of the music teacher in fostering an environment that is affirming to gender-diversity. These efforts have pointed toward LGBTQ representation in music curriculum and content, the use of gender-inclusive language, and changes to administrative policies and procedures that guide music programs (Bergonzi, 2009; Garrett, 2012; Silvera, 2019). As teachers have made efforts to include LGBTQ content into the curriculum and develop strategies to challenge gender bias, scholars have found that educators benefit from an enhanced understanding of the needs and experiences of LGBTQ students to do so impactfully (Jorgensen, 2010; Silveira & Goff, 2016). Garrett and Palkki (2019) posit the use of academic (*sopranos* instead of *girls*) and gender-inclusive language (*folks* instead of *guys*), an awareness and open

discussion of gender bias in repertoire selections, a change in approach to concert attire, reviewing and advocating for reform of state music organization policies that discriminate based on gender, and gender-inclusive over-night trip guidelines, as recommendations for fostering an inclusive choral program. Similarly, Palkki (2020) studied the secondary choral music experiences of three transgender students. Palkki suggested that school policies, administration, norms of school choral programs, and outside music organizations (e.g., state music education or activities organizations) were elements that either challenged or negated the choral music experiences of the profiled students.

Garrett and Sims (2019) underscored many pedagogical considerations for choral directors related to the transgender singing voice. The authors proposed that gender-inclusive singing instruction requires approaching each singer as an individual, free from preconceived gender stereotypes. They also underscored understanding of voice feminization and voice masculinization, the desired voice type of a singer, and the effect of various medical and non-medical interventions on the singing voice as key concepts in teaching singers who identify as transgender (Garrett & Sims, 2019). Further, researchers have noted the importance of individual conversations regarding needed changes to assigned voice parts and a focus on healthy vocal production, particularly if a singer is transitioning (Garrett & Sims, 2019; Saplan, 2018).

The line of research exploring the experiences of singers who identify as transgender is growing. Scholars have noted that gender-based ensembles (men's choirs and women's choirs), male/female concert attire and repertoire that presents gender as binary or reinforces gender-stereotypes, all serve as barriers for full inclusion of transgender singers in secondary choral music settings (Bergonzi, 2009; Nichols, 2012; Palkki, 2017; Roulston & Misawa, 2011; Silvera, 2019; Trollinger, 1993). Researchers have explored the lived experiences of transgender singers and investigated the opinions and attitudes of music educators associated with teaching LGBTQ students (Palkki, 2020; Nichols, 2012; Silveira, 2019; Silveira & Goff, 2016). However, no extant studies were discovered that attempted to quantify and qualify the changes choral directors have made to create more inclusive learning environments for transgender singers and the choral director's confidence in doing so.

The purpose of the present study was to examine the gender-inclusive instructional practices of choral directors in secondary schools and their level of confidence in teaching transgender students. This research was guided by the following questions:

1. What instructional practices do secondary school choral directors report to demonstrate gender-inclusivity in their teaching?

2. What level of confidence do secondary school choral directors report regarding their ability to teach transgender students?

Method

I used a simple descriptive and comparative descriptive design for this study. A simple descriptive approach was used to explore choral directors' self-reported gender-inclusive teaching practices, and a comparative descriptive approach was used to ascertain participant confidence in teaching students who identify as transgender. A University Institutional Review Board approved the investigation and granted an exemption from collecting signed consent from participants. In an effort to reach as many secondary school choral directors as possible, I developed a web-based survey instrument for data collection. I administered a pilot study to ensure question clarity, establish estimated response time, and to explore methods for coding and reporting the survey data. Pilot study participants ($N = 30$) submitted responses and I collected feedback regarding their experiences. As a result of feedback from pilot study participants, I made changes regarding question construction, typographical errors, and the order of questions.

Through convenience and snowball sampling, I recruited secondary school choral music educators with experience teaching in secondary schools in the United States to participate. First, the American Choral Directors Association (ACDA) distributed an invitation to participate, including a link to the survey, in a monthly electronic newsletter sent to the current membership of ACDA. Distribution of the invitation to participate in the ACDA electronic newsletter was sent to approximately 4,000 potential participants and gathered 467 responses. Second, I sent an email to immediate and proximal spheres of colleagues and former colleagues, inviting them to participate and to share the invitation with others. Further, I leveraged social media (Facebook and Twitter) to share the survey link and invitation to participate. Finally, I made direct, in-person invitations by handing out printed materials at a national convention of the American Choral Directors Association.

The inclusion criteria were as follows: (a) submissions with complete responses to all required survey questions, and (b) indication of current or previous experience teaching choral music to students in secondary schools (6th through 12th grades). Additionally, I chose to include responses from participants who worked or taught in settings outside of a physical secondary school (e.g., university, church, community choir) but worked with secondary school aged students on a regular basis. Submitted surveys that failed to meet the inclusion criteria were those that were opened but had no answers submitted ($n = 223$), and submissions that omitted consent to participate ($n = 8$); or no experience teaching secondary school students ($n = 9$). Based on these criteria, 227 surveys were included for analysis in this study. Because participants were not required to answer all survey questions, the total number of responses for each question varied from the total number of study participants.

While the survey for this study was designed to examine choral directors' experiences with gender-inclusive instructional practices and confidence in teaching singers who identify as transgender, the reader should consider the possibility of participant bias. Because participants in this study volunteered to participate, they may have brought pre-existing points of view to the topic of working with students who identify as transgender. The deci-

sion to contribute could indicate that respondents may have previous knowledge or experiences with teaching singers who identify as transgender, and this previous knowledge or experience may have influenced the results of this study.

Participants in this study ($N = 227$) were choral directors from across the United States[1] with experience teaching students in secondary school grade levels. Thirty-four percent ($n = 78$) of respondents identified as male and 59% ($n = 133$) identified as female. Individuals who identified as transgender, non-binary, or some other gender not defined in the prescribed options accounted for 2% of participants ($n = 6$) and 4% of participants ($n = 8$) declined to share their gender identity. When indicating sexual orientation, 68% of participants ($n = 154$) identified as straight, 18% of participants ($n = 41$) identified as gay, 6% of participants ($n = 13$) identified as bisexual, 5% of participants ($n = 11$) identified as a sexual orientation not provided among the prescribed options, and 4% of participants ($n = 8$) chose not to disclose their sexual orientation.

Participants reported their school setting, secondary grade levels taught, and years of teaching experience. When I asked participants how they described their school setting, 23% ($n = 52$) indicated rural, 46% ($n = 105$) indicated suburban, 23% ($n = 52$) indicated urban, and 8% ($n = 18$) described their school setting as being comprised of students from a variety of communities. Study participants taught middle school (31%, $n = 93$), high school (46%, $n = 140$), or indicated they currently or previously had experience teaching a combination of both middle school and high school (23%, $n = 69$). Choral directors with ten or more years of teaching experience comprised 59% of participants ($n = 133$) and 42% of participants ($n = 94$) reported teaching experience ranging from nine years to one year.

I used Qualtrics, a web-based survey and data collection software, to create the survey for this study. The survey included a total of 39 items: a consent statement; four questions regarding experience teaching singers who identify as transgender; 13 questions addressing gender-inclusive teaching practices, 13 four-point, forced-choice Likert-type scale responses related to confidence in teaching students who identify as transgender; and eight demographic questions. Questions surrounding gender-inclusive teaching practices were based on extant research exploring the topic in choral music settings (Bergonzi, 2009; Moisescu, 2014; Palkki, 2020; Nichols, 2012; Roulston & Misawa, 2011; Trollinger, 1993).

Four of the questions examining gender-inclusive teaching were open-response. These questions addressed successes and challenges with gender-inclusive teaching, reasons a participant may have chosen not to engage in gender-inclusive teaching, and participant descriptions of their approach to gender-neutral concert attire. I chose to quantify participant responses to the questions regarding successes with gender-inclusive teaching, challenges with gender-inclusive teaching, and reasons a participant elected not to alter their teaching to be more inclusive of gender diversity. While reading participant responses to each of these questions, I took notes, recording the sentiment(s) expressed in each statement, and

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[1] Thirty-eight states and the District of Columbia are represented in the sample. Participants from Alaska, Delaware, Montana, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, North Dakota, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Vermont, and West Virginia are not represented.

based on my notes, established emergent themes. Using my notes, I developed procedural definitions and coding instructions for each theme.

   After developing procedural definitions and corresponding themes, I then used them to code each response. I thematically coded participant responses expressing success with gender-inclusive teaching:

• **classroom culture:** Statements pertaining to broad structural or behavioral changes to the choral program or institution, multiple approaches toward gender-inclusive teaching practice, or other similar words, phrases, or ideas.

• **concert attire:** Statements pertaining to changes or accommodations made to the pre-scribed clothing options that singers wear for performance or other similar words, phrases, or ideas.

• **inclusive language:** Statements pertaining to the language used in rehearsal and/or in print or other similar words, phrases, or ideas.

• **singing considerations:** Statements pertaining to the transgender singing voice or other similar words, phrases, or ideas.

I coded participant statements expressing challenges with a gender-inclusive approach to their teaching:

• **community response:** Statements pertaining to the response or lack of response by educational stakeholders, students, parents, and/or community members related to the individual teacher's ability to be inclusive of transgender singers or other similar words, phrases, or ideas.

• **inclusive language:** Statements pertaining to the language used in rehearsal and/or in print, or other similar words, phrases, or ideas.

• **student support:** Statements pertaining to the individual choral director's ability to offer support or accommodations to singers who identify as transgender or other similar words, phrases, or ideas.

• **teacher knowledge:** Statements pertaining to an individual teacher's knowledge or lack of knowledge related to the singing and non-singing experiences of transgender individuals or other similar words, phrases or ideas.

   I also coded participant responses expressing why they did not alter their teaching practices. Coding decisions were guided by the following themes and corresponding definitions:

- **already gender-inclusive:** Statements pertaining to the existence of current gender-inclusive teaching practices, or other similar words, phrases, or ideas.

- **disagreement with gender-inclusivity:** Statements pertaining to a disagreement with practices that are consistent with the inclusion of students who identify as transgender in a choral music setting, or other similar words, phrases, or ideas.

- **no need:** statements pertaining to no effort being made toward gender-inclusive instruction because of the absence of a transgender singer, or other similar words, phrases, or ideas.

- **vocal health:** Statements pertaining to gender-inclusive teaching practice as being in conflict with healthy singing pedagogy, a vocal health approach to singing instruction eliminating the need for gender-inclusive teaching, or other similar words, phrases, or ideas.

A reliability observer reviewed and coded each response using the same coding scheme. Consistent with Lavarkas (2008), intercoder reliability between my coding decisions and the reliability observer remained greater than .90 and were considered "highly reliable" (p. 3). The methodologies I used to establish thematic coding and reliability were in alignment with standard analysis practices for survey-based research (Lavarkas, 2008).

The 4-point Likert-type scale ranged from 1 (*no confidence*) to 4 (*high confidence*). I developed these statements based on existing research regarding teaching practices considered to be inclusive of students who identify as transgender (Brill & Pepper, 2008; Erickson-Schroth, 2014; Hearns & Kremer, 2018; Hershberger, 2005; Krell, 2014; Lessley, 2017; McGuire et al., 2010; Palkki, 2020; Rastin, 2016; Roy, 2015; Sims, 2017a, 2017b). To facilitate subsequent comparisons, themes represented in these statements were the same as those used for questions exploring gender-inclusive teaching practices. I chose a 4-point scale to force a choice between *high confidence* and *no confidence* and remove the option of a neutral response.

To determine internal consistency, I performed Cronbach's alpha reliability analysis on the 4-point Likert-type scale items for the pilot test survey ($n = 15$) and for the final online survey ($n = 13$) items. Overall reliability for the pilot test was high ($\alpha = .91$). Following the pilot test face validity procedure, I removed two Likert-type scale items, and changed the Likert-type scale from *agree/disagree* to *high confidence/no confidence.* Once official data collection had concluded, I performed the reliability procedure on data from the final online survey. Overall reliability for the final online survey was high ($\alpha = .83$), indicating a moderately high degree of internal consistency.

Readers should note that I, as the researcher, identify as a gay, cisgender male. I do not identify as transgender but am a part of the LGBTQ community and an ally of transgender people. I have attempted to conduct and report this research free from my own potential

bias and privilege, but these elements may have influenced this study. Nonetheless, the results of this study remain important in adding to a growing body of research in music education aimed at improving the music learning experiences of students who identify as transgender.

Results

Experiences Teaching Transgender Singers

Participants ($N = 227$) answered a series of questions addressing their previous knowledge of and experiences with teaching singers who identify as transgender. Almost all respondents (93%, $n = 211$) indicated that they had engaged with resources related to teaching students who identify as transgender. Individual participants were able to offer multiple responses using a "choose all that apply" format, resulting in a total of 582 responses. Only 4% of responses ($n = 26$) cited training in college, and 3% indicated training through in-service professional development sessions provided by their school district. Figure 1 presents responses ($n = 582$) showing types of training or sources related to teaching students who identify as transgender.

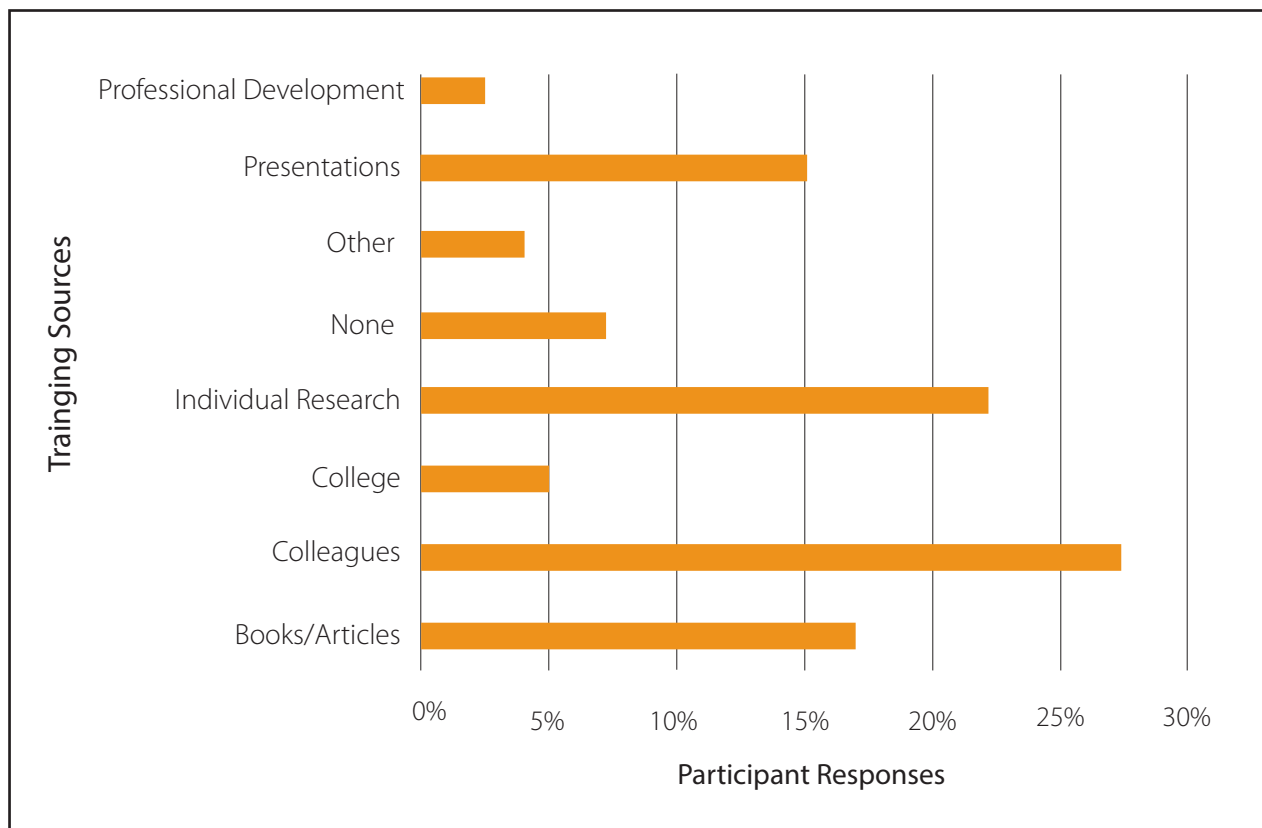**Figure 1**

Participants' Reported Training/Sources

Figure 1. Participants' reported training/sources (n = 582) related to teaching students who identify as transgender.

Participants ($N = 227$) also reported experiences teaching transgender singers. Sixty-eight percent of participants ($n = 154$) indicated they experienced teaching a singer who identified as transgender and 32% of participants ($n = 73$) reported no experience teaching a student who identified as transgender. I asked respondents with experience teaching transgender singers ($n = 154$) a series of questions about those experiences. Seventy-nine percent of these respondents ($n = 122$) reported having taught one to five singers who identified as transgender and 15% of participants ($n = 22$) reported having taught six to ten students who identified as transgender. When I asked how recently they taught a student who identified as transgender 45% of these same respondents ($n = 114$) indicated one to five years ago and 42% of participants ($n = 105$) indicated they were currently teaching a student who identified as transgender. Finally, I asked participants with experience teaching transgender singers how they knew that their singers identified as transgender. The structure of the survey allowed this subgroup of participants ($n = 154$) to offer multiple answers to this question, resulting in a total of 318 responses. Forty-four percent of these responses ($n = 140$) indicated participants became aware that one or more of their singers identified as transgender because the individual student or students told them, and 20% ($n = 64$) indicated that participants became aware that one or more of their singers identified as transgender based on their own observations.

Gender-Inclusive Teaching Practices

The primary research question in this study sought to examine a phenomenon I, as a choral director, had observed anecdotally: some choral directors in secondary schools had begun to change their teaching practices to create experiences that are more inclusive of transgender singers. When I asked study participants ($N = 227$) if they altered their teaching practices or policies and procedures guiding their choral program to be more inclusive of singers who identify as transgender, 78% ($n = 176$) of participants reported having made these changes.

Sixty-eight percent of participants ($n = 154$) indicated that they taught one or more singers who identified as transgender. Experience teaching a student who identifies as transgender may indeed impact a choral director's implementation of gender-inclusive teaching practices. Therefore, I performed a chi-square test to compare use of gender-inclusive instructional practices between participants who indicated having taught a singer who identified as transgender and those who had not. Results showed that participants who had taught a singer who identified as transgender reported use of gender-inclusive teaching practices significantly more often than those who had not, $\chi^2(2, N = 227) = 25.64$, $p = .0001$.

Study participants reported that they taught high school ($n = 86$, 38%), middle school ($n = 41$, 18%), middle school and high school ($n = 50$, 22%), or that they work with secondary school students in some other capacity ($n = 45$, 20%). I performed a chi-square test to examine the participants' implementation of gender-inclusive teaching practices across grade levels taught. Results indicated a significantly different frequency distribution among those

teachers who worked with high school singers and those who worked with younger singers. High school choral directors were significantly more likely than other participants to engage in gender-inclusive teaching practices, $\chi^2(3, N = 227) = 16.11, p = 0.0011$.

Ninety-three percent of participants in this study reported engaging in training or accessing resources related to teaching singers who identify as transgender (see Figure 1). Training or engaging with resources may influence whether or not a teacher chooses to use teaching practices that seek to include singers who identify as transgender. As a result, I performed a chi-square test and found that participants who engaged in training related to teaching transgender students were more likely to report use of gender-inclusive teaching, $\chi^2 (1, N = 227) = 25.05, p = .0001$.

Successes and Challenges with Gender-Inclusive Teaching Practices

I asked respondents who indicated they changed their teaching practices ($n = 176$) to elaborate by reporting one success and one challenge in their efforts to create a more gender-inclusive singing environment. After reviewing responses addressing success with gender-inclusive teaching, I thematically coded these statements: classroom culture, concert attire, inclusive language, and singing considerations. Of these responses, 48% ($n = 84$) of participants indicated success was related to inclusive language, 26% ($n = 46$) attributed success to classroom culture, 18% ($n = 32$) experienced success with concert attire becoming more gender-inclusive; and 7% ($n = 12$) were successful with singing considerations.

Choral directors ($n = 176$) who indicated they altered their teaching practice in an effort to be more inclusive to singers who identify as transgender ($n = 176$) were also asked to describe one challenge they encountered in regard to changing their instruction. I reviewed and coded these statements based on emergent themes: community response, inclusive language, student support, teacher knowledge, and none. Twenty-five percent ($n = 45$) of participants found inclusive language to be a challenge, 22% ($n = 38$) of participants struggled with student support, 21% ($n = 37$) of participants cited issues with community response, 17% ($n = 30$) reported they did not encounter a challenge, and 15% ($n = 26$) of participants found *teaching knowledge* to be an obstacle. Table 1 on the next page offers representative participant statements regarding successes and challenges with gender-inclusive teaching for each of the related coding categories.

Primary Factor Influencing No Change

While most choral directors in this study ($n = 177, 78\%$) reported altering their teaching practices to be more inclusive of singers who identify as transgender, 22% ($n = 51$) of participants indicated that they had not made any changes. I asked these respondents to describe the most important factor influencing this decision. After reviewing participants' written responses, I coded them by emerging theme: already gender-inclusive, disagreement with gender inclusivity, no need, and vocal health. Of the participants who indicated that they made no changes to their teaching practices, 65% ($n = 33$) indicated the primary

Table 1

Participant Statement Examples: Success and Challenge with Gender-inclusive Teaching

Coding Category	Statement Example
Success	
Classroom Culture	With my 8th grade students, I was able to have a conversation about labels and allow them to share their feelings to hopefully create a safe, brave space for everyone.
Concert Attire	All the students were happy about the concert-attire change, they liked to have more options to express themselves the way they wanted to. I went with 3 options, one included a skirt (with length requirements), two options included pants, and one option included a tie.
Inclusive Language	Open discussions with a non-binary student allowed me to know that he was less comfortable when I addressed the men as 'gentlemen.' I made a conscious effort to change my language to be neutral (e.g., Ok folks...) and he appeared more at ease.
Singing Considerations	Reviewing voice types at the beginning of each semester to remind students that typical genders can sing voice types that are unexpected i.e., boys can sing soprano.
Challenge	
Community Response	Administration (superintendent) at one school would not allow a girl to go to the women's restroom. She had to dress in the men's bathroom, do her long hair, and put on her makeup in the men's bathroom.
Inclusive Language	Old habits die hard. I felt the biggest challenge was the correct usage of pronouns.
Student Support	The depression the singer often feels.
Teacher Knowledge	Hard to figure out technique for folks taking hormones. Lots of trial and error and more limited ranges. Definitely a struggle for me to give specific technical advice.
None	None

factor influencing this decision was because there was no need to do so. "I have not made any changes because I have not had any students to necessitate the changes. When I have them, I will absolutely make the changes," is a participant response characteristic of those categorized, no need. Sixteen percent ($n = 8$) indicated that their teaching practices were already gender-inclusive, including one participant who stated, "I am a first-year teacher and

started out inclusive of gender. I advise the Genders and Sexualities Alliance at my school." Similarly, 16% (*n* = 8) of respondents cited vocal health as a reason for not embracing gender-inclusive practices. For example, "This student was a soprano, and he was okay singing soprano because I told him the importance of vocal health … Singing in another register for long periods could damage the voice," is a participant response that illustrates those emphasizing vocal health. Three percent of participants (*n* = 2) expressed a disagreement with a gender-inclusive approach, including one participant who said:

> It is extremely difficult for me to reconcile gender preference with the anatomy and physiology of a physical male or a physical female because the voice can't be "chosen" without chemical or surgical intervention - if at all. It is disruptive to the choral ensemble, and confusing to students, when a student who physically has a certain voice part asks to sing a different part. How is this fair to the other kids? To the ensemble as a whole? In competition? I have had to alter rooming practices when traveling for performances or competition, and that has gotten parents in an uproar as well.

Voice Part Assignments, Gender-Based Choirs, and Concert Attire

Study participants reported variables (*n* = 579) they considered when assigning a singer to a voice part (soprano, alto, tenor, bass) in a choral ensemble. The survey provided four options, gender, vocal range, musical ability and other variables, and the ability to select more than one response. Forty seven percent of participants (*n* = 272) indicated they assigned voice parts based on vocal range, 27% (*n* = 156) reported musical ability, 13% (*n* = 75) chose gender and 13% (*n* = 75) indicated other variables influenced their voice part assignments.

When I asked respondents whether any ensembles in their school's choral program were identified by gender (e.g., men's choir, women's choir, or some other term/title indicating male or female) slightly more than half of participants (*n* = 126, 56%) reported no choral ensembles identified by gender and 44% (*n* = 101) of participants indicated having choral ensembles identified by gender. I asked choral directors who reported having gender-based choral ensembles if they allowed singers of a different gender to participate in one of these ensembles, and 78% (*n* = 79) of these teachers reported they would do so. Participants who indicated that they did not have choral ensembles identified by gender reported whether any of these groups performed repertoire exclusively written for any combination of soprano/alto or tenor/bass voices, and 54% (*n* = 68) of this group answered affirmatively. As a follow-up question, they were asked to provide names and voicings for these ensembles. Table 2 on the next page shows the voicings and names for ensembles reported as gender-neutral.

Survey participants answered a series of questions addressing concert attire for their choral ensembles. When I asked participants if they assigned concert attire based on gender (e.g., male students wear tuxes and female students wear dresses), 58% (*n* = 132) reported

Table 2

Ensemble Voicings and Names Reported as Gender Neutral

Voicing	Ensemble Name	Voicing	Ensemble Name
T/B	Aces	TTBB	Kapituran
SSAA	Advanced Treble Ensemble	T/B	Kor
T/B	Argo Chorus	S/A	Les Chanteus
T/B	BariTenors	TTBB	Lunch Ensemble
T/B	Basso	S/A	Lyric
SSA	Bel Canto	T/B	Primo Vox
S/A	Bella Voci	S/A or T/B	Primo, Secondo, Terzo (by hour/class period)
SSAA	Belle Ange	S/A	Sorellanza
SSAA	Cantando	T/B	Tenor/Bass Choir
TTBB	Cantate	T/B	The Black and Gold
SSAA	Choraliers	S/A	Treble Choir
T/B	Colt Choir	S/A	Treble Tempos
T/B	Concordia	TTBB	Troubadors
T/B	Doublewide	T/B	Viking Choir
T/B	Elements Choir Tenor Bass Ensemble	S/A	Virtuosa
S/A	Elements Choir Treble Ensemble	SSAA	Voca Lyrica
TTBB	Fortis Chorum	TTB	Voces Valientes
T/B	Glee Club	SSAA	Voci Etern
S/A	Kapelle	T/B	Voci Sonore

Note. Duplicate submissions and identifying names were not included.

concert attire was not assigned based on gender, and 42% (*n* = 95) reported gender-based concert attire. Respondents who indicated they assigned concert attire based on gender were asked if they made accommodations for students wishing to wear attire that did not traditionally match their section. Among those who did assign attire based on gender, 72% (*n* = 68%) noted that they did make accommodations for each singer to wear the concert attire with which they were most comfortable.

I asked study participants who did not assign concert attire based on gender to describe concert attire options for their singers. Eighteen percent (*n* = 30) of this group reported that their choral ensembles wore choir robes, 26% (*n* = 43) of participants reported that their choirs wore tuxedos or dresses and their singers could choose the option with which they were most comfortable, 41% (*n* = 69) of participants reported that their choirs wore gender-neutral concert attire, and 15% (*n* = 26) reported that their ensembles wore some other attire not assigned by gender. When I asked participants to describe their gender-neutral concert attire, responses included: (a) variations on all-black apparel, some including accessories like scarves, ties or pins often reflecting school colors and/or mascot or (b) a standard shirt (polo, t-shirt, or dress shirt) and pants or skirt.

Confidence in Teaching Transgender Singers

Participants rated each of the 13 confidence items presented in the survey, using a 4-point Likert-type scale (1 = *no confidence*; 4 = *very confident*). The first of the 13 statements asked participants to rate their overall confidence in their ability to teach a student who identified as transgender. Responses to this question yielded a group rating of *moderate confidence* (*M* = 3.07, *SD* = 0.76). In addition, I calculated an aggregate mean and standard deviation confidence rating for the remaining 12 survey items (see Table 3).

Table 3
Mean and Standard Deviation Scores for Confidence Statement Responses for All Participants (N=227)

Statements in Order of Reported Confidence	*M*	*SD*
I know how to apply the use of preferred pronouns (e.g., he, she, they) and *gender-neutral language (e.g., "sopranos, measure 24," versus "girls, measure 24")* during rehearsal and in the structure of my choral program.	3.60	0.63
I could describe the differences between the terms *sexual orientation and gender identity.*	3.59	0.69

I could define the term *transgender*.	3.55	0.63
I could explain what it means for a student who identifies as transgender to be *transitioning*.	3.54	0.71
I have knowledge of accommodations I could make related to *concert attire* for transgender students.	3.52	0.72
I am aware of the *social and emotional challenges* many transgender students encounter.	3.35	0.72
I have knowledge of accommodations I could make related to *choral standing formation* for transgender students.	3.27	0.93
I could describe the term *non-binary*.	3.09	1.08
I am aware of *positive representations of transgender individuals* that I could include in my teaching.	2.55	1.08
I am aware of other gender-related *medical treatments* that may impact a student's singing voice.	2.55	1.07
I understand how *hormone therapy* (taking estrogen or testosterone) impacts a student's speaking and singing voice.	2.54	1.06
I am aware of other gender-related *non-medical measures* that may impact a student's singing voice.	2.49	1.02

I used these scores to draw comparisons between participants' confidence in teaching singers who identify as transgender ($M = 3.07$) and the other twelve statements. Using a t test, I examined the possible differences in participants' self-reported confidence in working with students who identify as transgender between the two groups of choral directors who do/do not engage in gender-inclusive teaching practices. Results of the t test found significantly different confidence scores between the two groups, suggesting that a choral director who was confident in their ability to work with transgender singers has also adapted their teaching practices to be more gender-inclusive, $t(69) = 2.05$, $p = .04$.

I asked the choral directors in this study if they had received formal training (college coursework, conference presentations, professional development), informal training (discussions with colleagues, books/articles, individual informal research), or no training in teaching singers who identify as transgender. Fifty-one percent ($n = 116$) of participants reported receiving formal training, 34% ($n = 77$) of participants reported seeking out informal training, and 43% ($n = 98$) of participants stated they had not received any training.

Since the nature of a participants' training may impact their confidence in teaching a singer who identifies as transgender, I conducted a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) to compare the mean confidence scores of participants in each group (formal, informal, no training). There was a significant difference in the mean confidence scores among teachers who received different types of training, $F(2, 224) = 8.09$ $p = .0004$. I also conducted a Tukey post-hoc analysis and found a significant difference between the confidence scores of teachers who received formal training and informal training ($p = .002$), and between teachers who received formal training and no training ($p = .001$). There was no significant difference between teachers who received informal training and teachers who received no training. Teachers who received formal training reported being more confident ($M = 3.27$, $SD = 0.67$) than teachers with informal training ($M = 2.92$, $SD = 0.76$) and teachers who never received training ($M = 2.80$, $SD = 0.87$).

Discussion

Secondary school choral directors participating in this study ($N = 227$) responded to questions surrounding gender-inclusive instructional practices and confidence in teaching students who identify as transgender. I developed the survey based on best practices that emerged in extant related research (Bergonzi, 2009; Moisescu, 2014; Nichols, 2012; Palkki, 2017; Roulston & Misawa, 2011; Trollinger, 1993). Results of the present study underscore the findings of existing research addressing gender-inclusive teaching in choral music and highlights areas for future inquiry. Further, I found that many study participants have begun or are beginning to adjust teaching practices to be more inclusive of singers who identify as transgender, a question that does not appear to have been explored in previous research.

Experiences Teaching Transgender Singers

A majority of the choral directors in this study (68%) reported having taught a choral ensemble singer who identified as transgender. This finding seems predictable, based on previous research which pointed to an increase in the number of students in secondary schools who openly identified as transgender (Kosciw et al., 2016). Study participants reported their formal or informal training related to teaching students who identify as transgender. While an overwhelming majority of study participants (93%) indicated having explored this topic in some way, most of those experiences were informal or self-motivated (e.g., books, articles, conversations with colleagues). Only 5% of participants said that gender-inclusive teaching practices were addressed in their undergraduate or graduate course work and only 3% reported having had a school-administered professional development session on the topic. The contrast between the increasing number of students in schools who openly identify as transgender and the small number of formal learning experiences for preservice and in-service choral music educators underscores an area for concern and action. Data

analysis also revealed that formal training experiences not only influenced the likelihood that a choral director would engage in gender-inclusive teaching but also their confidence in doing so. Attempts to bridge this gap in professional development and music education curricula may allow choral music educators to make more informed decisions about their gender-inclusive instructional practices. Efforts to reform music teacher development and training may also reduce the possibility of homophobic and transphobic bias being part of music teacher training (Garrett, 2012).

When I asked participants how many transgender students they have had in their ensembles, 79% reported having taught one to five singers who identified as transgender. Of these participants, 20% indicated that they became aware of the gender identity of their student(s) based on their own observations. Not explored in this study were variables that led these participants to conclude their singer(s) identified as transgender. However, these findings seem to perpetuate the troublesome practice of making assumptions based on one's own observations regarding gender identity and underscore the need to explore the consequential implications of teaching decisions informed by stereotypes (Bergonzi, 2009; Palkki, 2017).

Previous research has drawn attention to the underrepresentation of LGBTQ students based on the geographic location of an individual school (Kosciw et al., 2016; Silveira & Goff, 2016). It is interesting to note in this study, school community (urban, suburban, rural) or geographic location did not have a statistically significant effect on the variables related to a participant's experience teaching a student who identifies as transgender.

Gender-Inclusive Teaching Practices

Observations of various gender-related changes taking place in choral music and the findings of this research point to a growing trend toward gender-inclusive practices in school choral ensembles. Seventy-eight percent of participants in this study reported changing their instructional practices to be more inclusive of singers who identify as transgender. Efforts toward gender-inclusive teaching reported by participants in this study are similar to practices proposed in previous research (Bergonzi, 2009; Moisescu, 2014; Nichols, 2012; Palkki, 2020; Trollinger, 1993). In addition to confirming that choral music educators were making efforts to be more inclusive of gender diversity in their teaching, the findings of the present study also show that, while there were areas for growth in regard to in-service and preservice teacher development, the work scholars have done on this topic is indeed influencing the instructional practices of choral music educators.

The number of study participants who reported having altered their teaching and the specific changes they reported making seems to be in agreement with increased implementation of practices found to be inclusive of gender diversity reported in schools (Kosciw et al., 2016). The shift toward representation, inclusion, and empowerment of transgender students found in the present study and in extant research is perhaps most notable because these reforms have been found to decrease harassment and victimization and improve the overall school experiences of LGBTQ students (Kosciw et al., 2016).

The majority of participants in this study who indicated they changed their instructional practices were choral directors teaching at the high school level. The factors influencing a greater number of high school choral directors to alter their instructional practices may be related to variables such as voice change or stages of gender identity development attributed to high school aged students (Brill & Pepper, 2008). In addition, Parker (2020) posits the important role music-making plays in the lives of adolescent singers and the multifaceted process of musical identity development. Both previous research and the findings of this study support a deeper examination of the intersection of gender and school choral music at all levels (elementary, middle school, high school, college). Investigating the elements of choral singing experiences that advance a binary view of gender and gender stereotypes by grade level may reveal more specific areas for improvement related to level of singer development.

Choral directors participating in this study who previously or currently had a singer who identified as transgender were also more likely to alter their teaching practices. Although this affirms again that choir teachers have made and are making efforts to meet the needs of gender diverse-students, it also highlights that they are most likely to attempt to do so after a transgender singer has begun participation. Similarly, a majority of the subgroup of participants who said they made no changes to their teaching indicated it was because there was no need, exemplified by comments like, "I have not had a student like this." Such statements expressed that the need to move toward gender-inclusive teaching had not emerged because the teacher had not experienced teaching a singer who identified as transgender. Both of these findings indicate that some choral directors may see gender-inclusive teaching as outside of standard practice and merit an instructional accommodation or needs-based approach. However, if the heteronormative, transphobic, and gender stereotypes reinforced in many choral classrooms (Palkki, 2020) are indeed harmful, adopting a gender-inclusive approach, regardless of need, elevates the music learning experiences of all students. Further, reinforcing stereotypes associated with gender, sexual orientation, race, and others negate the goal of educational equity and a growing trend toward culturally responsive teaching, universal design for learning, and social and emotional learning (Humphrey et al., 2020; Rose, 2000; Vavrus, 2008; Warren, 2018). This investigation did not discriminate between gender-inclusive instructional practices that were approached as an accommodation and those that were comprehensive changes to the structure of a given choral program regardless of need. However, an examination of these two approaches, their ethical considerations, outcomes, and their impact on students may better inform the profession regarding the nature and delivery of choral music instruction.

The use of inclusive language emerged as a leading theme for study participants when reporting both successes and challenges with gender-inclusive teaching. Participant responses portrayed the use of inclusive language as a practice that was easily adopted but also described the difficulty in the shift with comments like, "Old habits die hard. I felt the biggest

challenge was the correct usage of pronouns." It is also interesting to note that many of the participants who did not make changes to their teaching practices discussed gender-inclusive language as a factor. Respondent emphasis on inclusive language used during instruction and a systematic approach for implementing this change presents an area for further research.

Concert attire and gender-based choirs were two elements explored in this study. Participant responses resulted in a potential resource regarding gender-inclusive concert attire and gender-neutral ensemble names. An investigation of these and other similar questions should be posed to a larger sample of choral educators and shared widely. Further, studying the traditional gender-based choral experience (men's choirs and women's choirs) to determine the role that these ensembles play in the structure of a choral landscape that seeks to be inclusive of gender-diversity is a critical extension of this and similar studies (Apfelstadt, 1998; Freer, 2012; Graf, 2016; Ramsey, 2013).

Confidence in Teaching Transgender Singers

Overall, choral directors in this study reported that they were *moderately confident* in their ability to work with singers who identified as transgender (see Table 2). When asked about specific aspects of gender-inclusive teaching, respondents were most confident in the application of gender-neutral language and preferred pronouns, and least confident in their knowledge of medical and non-medical gender-related treatments and their impact on the singing voice. While inclusive language related to gender has emerged as an important theme in this study, findings indicating that this is an area of high confidence may suggest that future research should focus on areas of less confidence. Results indicating study participants were less confident in their knowledge of medical and non-medical interventions and their impact on the singing voice highlights the need for this information to be communicated to the profession in a broad manner and included in formal training experiences for choral music educators.

Conclusions

The findings of the present study suggest choral directors participating in this research changed their teaching practices to be more inclusive of singers who identify as transgender. Data also imply that participants who taught high school or had previous experience teaching students who identify as transgender were more likely than other participants to engage in gender-inclusive instructional practices. These results indicate that study participants were moderately confident in their ability to teach singers who identify as transgender. On average, respondents were most confident with gender-inclusive language and least confident regarding the implications of medical and non-medical gender-related interventions on the singing voice.

The relevance of this study and others like it were underscored by participant comments

when asked if they had anything additional to add before they submitted their survey. Participant remarks illustrated the demand for more research in this area and for research findings to be shared widely with others in the profession. One participant's comment captured the sentiment of many regarding the importance of this topic.

> Taking this survey made me realize that even though I strive to be gender-inclusive in my choirs, I am not sure if I am being explicit enough. I want choir members to wear comfortable attire, but I asked myself, "do my students know that it's ok for a soprano to wear a tuxedo?" Also, I do not know of many transgender/non-binary composers or influential musicians. Resources and repertoire suggestions would be welcome in publications or convention workshops.

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Appendix

Survey

Choral Directors' Gender-Inclusive Teaching Practices

Introduction
I need your help in finding out more about the gender-inclusive teaching practices of middle school and high school choral directors...

You are invited to complete a nine-minute online survey as part of a research study investigating the gender-inclusive teaching practices of secondary school choral directors. By completing this survey, you are agreeing to participate in this research. You may choose to stop at any time. If you have any questions about this study, you may contact the investiga-

tor via email. Sharing your unique perspective will inform our field's understanding of current practice and establish a framework for approaches to create inclusive and welcoming choral music education experiences for all singers.

• I agree to participate in this study

Teaching Transgender Singers
For the purposes of this survey the term transgender is broadly used to describe individuals whose gender expression or gender identity differs from the sex they were assigned at birth.

• I am interested in learning about your experience teaching transgender singers.

Please indicate training you have received or sources with which you have engaged related to teaching transgender students: *(check all that apply)*

• None

• Undergraduate or graduate coursework

• Professional development provided by my school district

• Conference presentation(s)

• Books or articles

• My own research

• Discussions with colleagues

• Other, please specify:

Have you ever taught a singer who identified as transgender in a school choral ensemble?

• Yes

• No

• I don't know.

Approximately how many singers who identified as transgender have you taught?

• 1-5

• 6-10

• 11-15

• 15 or more

How did you know your student(s) identified as transgender? *(check all that apply)*

- The student(s) told me.
- The parents told me.
- Other students told me.
- My own observations.
- Other school staff told me.
- Other. Please specify:

When did you teach a student who identified as transgender? *(check all that apply)*

- Currently
- 1-5 years ago
- 6-10 years ago
- 11-15 years ago
- 16-20 years ago
- 20 or more years ago

How did your student(s) who were transgender identify? *(check all that apply)*

- Female to Male (FTM)
- Male to Female (MTF)
- Non-Binary (both or no gender)
- Something else. Please specify:
- I don't know.

Gender Inclusive Teaching Practices
The number of students who identify as transgender has seen a steady increase over the past decade. I'm interested in exploring how this trend may be influencing the teaching practices of secondary choral directors.

Have you made changes to your teaching practice and/or structure of your choral program to be more inclusive of singers who identify as transgender?

- Yes
- No

Describe *one success* you encountered in working to create a more inclusive environment for singers who identify as transgender.

Describe *one challenge* you encountered in working to create a more inclusive environment for singers who identify as transgender.

Describe the most important factor(s) influencing your decision not to make these changes.

When assigning a singer to a section (e.g. soprano, alto, tenor, bass) what variables do you consider? *(check all that apply)*

- Gender
- Vocal Range
- Musical Ability
- Other variables. Please specify:

Are any of the ensembles in your choral program identified by gender *(e.g. women's choir, men's choir, or some other term/title indicating male or female)*?

- Yes
- No

Do you/would you allow singers of a different gender to participate in one of these groups if their vocal range and ability matches that of the ensemble?

- Yes
- No
- Other. Please explain:

Does your choral program offer ensembles that exclusively sing repertoire composed for any combination of tenor/bass or soprano/alto voices?

- Yes
- No

What do you call these ensembles? Please indicate the ensemble name and primary voicing. *(e.g. Bass Clef Choir, T/B)*

Do you assign or require concert attire based on gender *(e.g. male students wear tuxes and female students wear dresses)*?

- Yes

- No

Do you accommodate students who wish to wear concert attire that doesn't traditionally match their section *(e.g. a soprano wants to wear a tux)*?

- Yes

- No

Check all that apply regarding concert attire for your choral program:

- We wear choir robes

- We wear tuxes and dresses. Students can select the option with which they are most comfortable.

- We wear gender-neutral concert attire. Please specify:

- Other. Please specify:

Confidence in Teaching Transgender Singers

How confident are you in your ability to work with singers who identify as transgender?

- No Confidence

- Slight Confidence

- Moderate Confidence

- High Confidence

The following statements are based on best practices identified in previous research regarding teaching transgender students and are designed to gather information about your own confidence in working with these singers in your ensemble(s). Please indicate your level of confidence *(No Confidence, Slight Confidence, Moderate Confidence, High Confidence)* in the following statements:

- I could define the term *transgender.*

- I could describe the differences between the terms *sexual orientation* and *gender identity.*

- I know how to apply the use of preferred pronouns *(e.g. he, she, they)* and *gender-neutral language (e.g. "sopranos, measure 24" verses "girls, measure 24")* during rehearsal and in the structure of my choral program.

- I am aware of the social and emotional challenges many transgender students encounter.

- I could describe the term *non-binary*.

- I could explain what it means for a student who identifies as transgender to be *transitioning*.

- I understand how *hormone therapy* (taking estrogen or testosterone) impacts a student's speaking and singing voice.

- I am aware of other gender-related *medical treatments* that may impact a student's singing voice.

- I am aware of other gender-related *non-medical measures* that may impact a student's singing voice.

- I have knowledge of accommodations I could make related to *concert attire* for transgender students.

- I have knowledge of accommodations I could make related to *choral standing formation* for transgender students.

- I am aware of positive representations of transgender individuals that I could include in my teaching.

Thanks for sharing your insights, please tell me a little bit about yourself!

Secondary grades you currently teach: *(check all that apply)*

- Middle School (6th - 8th Grades)

- High School (9th - 12th Grades)

- Other, please specify:

Number of years you have taught (including this year):

- 1-3 Years

- 4-6 Years

- 7-9 Years

- 10-19 Years

- 20 Years or more

State in which you teach:

How would you describe the community in which you teach?

- Rural
- Suburban
- Urban
- Other, please specify:

Gender

- Male
- Female
- Transgender
- Non-Binary
- Some other gender, please specify:
- I prefer not to answer.

Choose one or more races that you consider yourself to be:

- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian
- Black or African American
- Hispanic, Latino or Spanish Origin
- Middle Eastern or North African
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- White
- Some other race, ethnicity, or origin, please specify:
- I prefer not to answer.

Which of the following best describes your sexual orientation?

- Heterosexual (straight)
- Homosexual (gay)
- Bisexual
- Other, please specify:
- Prefer not to say

Your responses will help inform the profession about this emerging topic. Please feel free to offer any other thoughts you have below:

Thank you for sharing your experiences and insight. I am grateful for your participation! If you would like to receive a summary of the findings from this survey, CLICK HERE.

Request for Results

To receive a digital summary of the findings from this survey, please provide your email address. The email address you enter here will not be connected in any way to your previous survey responses.