Making space for inclusive approaches: A review of adolescent gender identity in high school choirs

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Abstract

Gender identity has received significant attention in choral music education, perhaps more than any other field of music education research. Issues concerning gender in choirs continue to prove challenging for adolescents and secondary school teachers. This article synthesizes a narrative literature review on gender identity research in high school choirs, offers suggestions for inclusive choral practices, and raises possibilities for future research. Gender research in Western cultural school choral contexts over the last century focused on a preoccupation with the shortage of male singers. Female participation in choir was considered commonplace and taken for granted, resulting in females being neglected in research until recently. Early material on male adolescent choral involvement tended to make very broad generalizations situated in hegemonic masculinity. By the 1990s, writers such as Koza were noting that these approaches to the issue had been unsuccessful, and recent writers have exposed the rich personal and contextual aspects of singers and their approaches to singing. Research in the past decade has attempted to demystify and empower transgender singers, though there is still much to learn in this area. Common inclusive approaches for diverse gender identities emerged from the literature. These include gender-inclusive language, a welcoming environment and supportive mentors, considered and contextualized repertoire choices, and whole group vocal pedagogy sensitive to individual needs. Future research is recommended to investigate the evolving relationship of contemporary gender identities with other components of the self, how multiple gender identities can be supported and positively co-exist, and the possible contributions of choral music education to gender identity development in a greater range of contexts, cultures, and traditions.

Keywords: Gender identity, inclusion, masculinity, femininity, LGBTQ+, transgender, adolescence, music education, singing pedagogy, choir, review

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Introduction

Debates concerning gender identity have plagued choral music education for centuries, perhaps more than any other field of music education. Attitudes and practices concerning gender in choral music and membership have significantly changed over time, ranging from neglect, panic recruitment, active inclusion, and demystification, to making space. The continued diversification of choral music and membership has brought with it ongoing challenges for high school teachers and conductors, particularly regarding vocal technique, pedagogy, and roles and relationships.

This article presents a narrative literature review on issues pertaining to adolescent gender identity in high school choirs and aims to synthesize inclusive approaches, offer suggestions for contemporary practice, and canvas new discussions. For this article, we aligned with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) agenda for inclusive education, defined as "a process: actions and practices that embrace diversity and build a sense of belonging, rooted in the belief that every person has value and potential and should be respected" (UNESCO, 2020, p. 11).

Methodology

Narrative overviews of literature are useful as they pull many perspectives together, present the development of a topic, and can provoke thoughts on ways forward (Green et al., 2006). Previous gender identity research in choral settings has typically considered the field from masculine, feminine, or transgender perspectives in isolation, whereas this article attempts to unite these discussions. A wide range of seminal and contemporary international research journal articles, book chapters, and texts in English by leading scholars and influential voices in music and choral education were drawn upon from the authors' personal and respective university libraries, academic databases, and Google Scholar. There were no restrictions on dates. It is noted that articles from publications for practitioners are given serious consideration in this review, such as the *Choral Journal* published by the American Choral Directors Association (ACDA), as they are important contributors in shaping the field. Sources were evaluated considering their relevance, credibility, salience, and for their contribution towards emerging issues. Literature was analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun, Clarke, Hayfield & Terry, 2019). Throughout the analytic process, we continually discussed, reflected on, and refined emerging patterns in the phenomena. Results are presented thematically, first beginning with chronological perspectives on gender identity in high school choral settings followed by a synthesis of gender inclusive approaches. Despite attempts to provide a global perspective, much of the cited literature is situated in Western English-speaking countries. A significant world population is silenced, notably from non-English-speaking countries, Africa, South America, the Middle East, Asia, and the Pacific Islands. This absence may represent the academic privilege of those authors publishing in English and suggests an examination of broader issues concerning gender identity in specific cultural contexts is needed.

Terms and Definitions

For the purposes of this article, we have adopted definitions used by The Human Rights Campaign (HRC), the largest LGBTQ+ civil rights organization within the United States. The HRC "strives to end discrimination against LGBTQ+ people and realize a world that achieves fundamental fairness and equality for all" in the United States and internationally (Human Rights Campaign [HRC], n.d.a). Gender identity refers to "one's innermost concept of self as male, female, a blend of both or neither – how individuals perceive themselves and what they call themselves. One's gender identity can be the same or different from their sex assigned at birth" (Human Rights Campaign [HRC], n.d.b). Transgender is "an umbrella term for people whose gender identity and/or expression is different from cultural expectations based on the sex they were assigned at birth" (HRC, n.d.b). In this article, we do not assume the gender identity of people. Instead, we reference birth-assigned sex and use "male," "female," and "they/their" except when quoting from existing literature that may use other terms.

Gender identity in choral settings intersects and works alongside other identities (Cayari, 2019; Hess, 2016), such as sexual (Palkki & Caldwell, 2018), social (Parker, 2018), musical (Goopy, 2020, 2022, 2023), singing (O'Bryan, 2015), religious (Owens & Welch, 2017), racial (Elorriaga, 2011; Kruse, 2016; Ververis, 2021), cultural (Monks, 2003; Orton & Pitts, 2019), and socioeconomic. The relationship between vocal and gender identities can be complex, is dynamic, and differs between individuals (Palkki, 2020).

The Missing Males

Disparities in choral group membership have long been discussed in gendered terms and the discussion focused on the shortage of male singers (Brinson, 1996; Freer, 2006, 2007; Harrison & Young, 2017). Koza noted that there was an issue of "missing males" in singing groups reported at the beginning of the 20th century (Koza, 1993), and the gender influence on singing and instrumental choice was well canvassed (Abeles, 2009; Abeles & Porter, 1978; Hallam et al., 2008; Harrison, 2007; O'Neill & Boultona, 1996; Wrape et al., 2016). There has been consistent commentary that males have not joined singing groups because singing, particularly in a high voice, is considered "effeminate" (Leck, 2009) and in opposition to hegemonic masculinity. "Hegemonic masculinity" (Connell, 1987, 2005; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005) refers to "the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women" (Connell, 2005, p. 77). For example, in England, Ashley (2009) found that English Choirboys would not tell their school friends that they were choir members and effectively led "double lives" (p. 109) in an effort to avoid scrutiny. Adolescent males were afraid to admit to singing because it was characterized as a feminine activity, and many men did not sing at all in a choral setting.

A traditional approach to this "gender problem" was binary opposition. If singing was

marginalized because it was "effeminate" and therefore not suitable for males, singing should be made more "masculine" to improve the numerical gender balance in choirs. Conductors were encouraged to take a hyper-heteronormative approach, encouraging males to see singing as something that was appropriate for "manly men" (Ashley, 2009; Freer, 2019). Koza (1993–1994) observed that "prevalent stereotypes also associate male homosexuality with femininity" (p. 61). The stereotyping of singing as feminine and related to homosexuality led Koza to claim that "homophobia, in addition to misogyny, may play a role in boys' reticence to sing" (p. 58). Singing by adult males was being condemned by association with femininity and male homosexuality as the "undesirable 'other'" (p. 58). Koza concluded that "nearly all the texts I examined drew from and reinforced systems of ideas that tend to perpetuate unequal power relations and that foster the continued oppression of women and gay men" (p. 61). Koza (1993–1994) exposed the over-simplification of gender identity in early choral texts. These texts recommended singing repertoire that would "thrill the redblooded male" and avoiding songs about "birds, daisies and butterflies" (Roe, 1983, p. 176). As well, males were to be separated from females in ensembles and every effort was to be made to ally the singing program with prominent and successful athletes (assumed to be male) (Miller, 2008; Roe, 1983). This "macho" characterization of singing may have unintentionally marginalized males who did not fit a macho stereotype (Brinson, 1996; Koza, 1993–1994; Young, 2017). As well as allegedly making conductors and teachers complicit in oppression, hyper-masculinizing singing had little effect on the number of adolescent males singing in choirs.

Neglecting "Ordinary" Females

Females have been historically neglected in choral singing. Patriarchal gender roles in Christian churches have excluded females from Cathedral choral music for millennia (Mould, 2007; Welch, 2010). At the turn of the twenty-first century, a shortage of male trebles, and an interest in gender equity, resulted in female singers being permitted to join the previously male bastion of the English cathedral choir (Owens & Welch, 2017). Owen and Welch focused on the comparative utility of children of different genders in the cathedral context and found that female children were as capable as male children. In Wells Cathedral, females and their parents were happy to adopt the traditional dress of the "professional" chorister; "cassock and surplice" with hair "up," and jewelry forbidden (Owens & Welch, 2017, p. 13). Gender concerns have clearly influenced choir membership on both sides of the Atlantic.

In secular settings, females significantly outnumber male singers in choral programs. Elpus (2015) found that high school choirs in the United States had consistently been 70% female-identifying and 30% male-identifying for the previous thirty years, with similar findings in English, Australian and German community choral settings (Clift & Hancox, 2010; Clift et al., 2010). Despite connotations of choral singing being feminine, adolescent females were historically excluded from choral singing research. O'Toole (1998) argued that

because society considered singing a normal feminine activity, females were neglected in the research, while males were privileged. She pointed out that most choral method books addressed issues with male singers, such as changing voices, recruitment, and engagement, but very few addressed issues related to females. Books did not address "what it means to be a female singer who is not difficult to recruit, has few noticeable vocal problems, is well-behaved and spends most of her time waiting for directors to turn their focus from male singers" (p. 15). O'Toole advocated for choral texts to address female puberty, gender inequity in repertoire selection, and the loss of opportunities and encouragement, which stemmed from the belief that "girls who sing are ordinary" while "boys who sing are special" (p. 9).

The past 30 years have seen an increased interest in the physiological and psychological issues related to the adolescent female changing voice. Sweet (2016) conducted a review of the *Choral Journal* from 1991 to 2015 and found that only five articles discussed the female changing voice with limited new understandings, whereas the male voice change was mentioned 33 times since 1977. Following the introduction of Eclectic Theory by Cooksey (1977), Lynne Gackle published *The Young Adolescent Female Voice (Ages 11-15): Classification, Placement, and Development of Tone* (Huff-Gackle, 1985). It was the first article of its kind, and Gackle (1991, 2000, 2006, 2011, 2014) became a leading expert on female vocal development, describing four stages (later named phases) of the female voice change as "shades of change."

In recent years, it has been recognized that many of the physiological and psychological struggles faced by adolescent males also apply to females (Ashley, 2009; Sweet, 2015). Sweet (2015) found that adolescent female singers also struggled with self-deprecation and humiliation and faced the same psychological and emotional risks as males during the voice change. She argued that adolescent females should not be ignored just because their issues are seemingly less severe than males.

Persistent Stereotyping

Gender stereotypes, particularly concerning males, persist. In 2009, Ashley claimed that "boys will sing provided they are not asked to choose between choir and sport, an unfair choice that youngsters should not have to make" (Ashley, 2009, p. 103). At the time, Ashley accepted a commonplace stereotype that males were naturally sporty and would prefer sport to singing. Recently, authors have questioned this assumption by noting the increasing number of males who do not identify with these traits and characteristics (McBride, 2016b; McBride & Palkki, 2020; Palkki, 2015). Despite this, McBride (2016a, 2016b) found that the hyper-masculinizing of choral and classroom singing continues. McBride's research investigating two gay male choral conductors found the participants were not open about their orientation in their schools because they feared they would lose male singers from their ensembles. This was despite the observation that "for many LGBTQ students and teachers, music classrooms are still one of the most accepting and safe spaces in North American schools today" (McBride, 2016b, p. 40). The research subjects seemed complicit in the use

of "hypermasculine narratives as a recruiting method for boys" and "unaware of their decisions to play into these stereotypes" (p. 40). They appeared to use "words like gay and effeminate almost interchangeably" (p. 40). The researcher reflects that he "purposely promoted an image of (him)self that was anything but stereotypically gay" (p. 40). He created "a version of himself" that was not authentic. McBride concluded, "These actions speak to the power of these discourses. If professionals in our field feel compelled to hide their identity at school simply because of the subject they teach, what messages are we actually sending to adolescent boys, LGBTQ or otherwise, about what it means to be a 'real man?'" (p. 40).

Perhaps some students were ahead of their teachers in this area. Freer (2019) quoted a student re-defining terms such as "real man" to mean more than "hegemonic masculinity" (p. 25). He recalled that, "one transgender boy I worked with… was not bothered by the phrase 'real man' at all. In contrast, they proudly proclaimed, 'I am a real man. And I sing. I'm just a different kind of real man than you are'" (p. 25). Similarly, Freer, criticized some researchers for problematizing the use of athletic imagery in rehearsal as reinforcing "hegemonic masculinity" by noting that many current successful athletes inhabit a range of orientations and gender identities. Freer sensibly suggested foregrounding singing ability rather than gender identity, but the research seems to suggest that negative stereotyping of singers and singing using stereotypical gender tropes persists and is not helpful.

Drawing upon Koza (1993–1994), McBride and Palkki (2020) analyzed choral method textbooks, articles, and websites published between 2008 and 2018 and found the general unquestioning of hegemonic masculinity and androcentrism in relation to the male voice change continued. However, they also argued that the influence of feminist scholars had provoked a more complex and inclusive discourse of gender, which made space for LGBTQIA+ issues.

Recent work has interrogated the persistence of stereotypically gendered approaches to singing amongst adolescents. Kelley (2021) applied Social Identity Theory to the issue and found "that participants will actively pursue activities that align with the values of the in-group and devalue activities that are associated with the out-group" (p. 276). Moreover, when gender was "activated" in a group, the tendency of that group was to adopt more stereotypical behavior. Once gender became activated in a social group, and gender conformity was required to have membership of the "in" group, males, who in Western cultures often saw music activities as "feminine," would first avoid them and if involved, may have tended to perform worse than they otherwise would. As well, Kelley found that "girls may be more willing to cross gender norms to seek perceived benefits or be encouraged to challenge gender roles that they find restrictive" (p. 283). In contrast, Kelly claimed that even if males liked "masculine" music activities more than "feminine" music activities, they may still be reluctant to participate because "they view the entire domain of music as a 'feminine' enterprise" (p. 283). Conductors and teachers should reflect on the circumstances under which gender can be "activated" in a group and the nature of the damaging

stereotyping that can result.

Bullying based on gender stereotypes continues in school music (e.g., Bond, 2017; Kelley, 2021; Palkki, 2020). Rawlings (2016), when looking at bullying in instrumental music, noted that stereotyping by instrument choice continued and lamented the stereotypical and binary gender divisions in music education and research. He claimed, "Music education research investigating gender association and musical instruments has not acknowledged the range of masculinities and femininities in our cultures or considered the underlying distinction between gender, a social construct, and sex, a biological construct, the form of which depends on myriad societal influences and messages" (p. 18). Choral teachers and conductors might respond that, at least in instrumental music, students could choose stereotypically gender-appropriate instruments. Singers did not get to choose their voice and instead are confronted with the decision of whether they will sing at all; a decision which seems to still be swayed by stereotypical gendered approaches and identity concerns. Rawlings made an important call for a more nuanced approach to gender in music which accommodates the "range of masculinities and femininities" enacted and constructed in our students today (p. 18). He was supported by Ashley (2015), who reported "a softening of attitudes and greater acceptance of boys perceived as or who come out as gay" (p. 173). Ashley noted, however, that "society remains fundamentally patriarchal" so "there is a long way to go before" male singers, in particular, are permitted to sing "unfettered by social attitudes" (p. 173).

Gender Identity Formation

Stereotypical gender attitudes to singing have persisted in Western contexts, but reactive, reductive, and hyper-masculine stereotypical gendered approaches by conductors and teachers are not the solution. Gender fluidity and gender choice have been common concepts for students who were navigating the sometimes-tumultuous storms of adolescent identity construction. In 2015, Freer, when investigating changing-voice males in England, Ireland, Greece, and Spain, applied Identity Based Motivation Theory, which "posits that identities are multiple, fluid and constructed within specific contexts as subjectively interpreted by the individual" (Freer, 2015, p. 88). Adolescents act in accordance with these identities. Ashley (2015) explained that "children may be born with the physical bodies of boys or girls, but gender itself and the degree of comfort with the given body are highly fluid social constructions" (p. 107). Further, he claimed, "nowhere is there greater fluidity and uncertainty of identity than amongst the 11-14 age group" where adolescents "try out and discard different aspects of identity" while they develop their own (p. 108). Freer (2015) found that students in England, Ireland, and Greece were bullied for singing, sensed a loss of identity when undergoing voice change, and valued supportive friends and role models at this crucial time. Freer was supported by Parker (2007), who advocated that the "optimal position for adolescents is when they are with their friends… The teacher's role is to foster these relationships" (p. 28). Ashley (2015) added that "many boys already harbor high levels of singing anxiety and are extremely vulnerable to fears of failure" (p. 178). Ashley reflect-

ed that males' voices literally fail them when their identity is most insecure, often leading them to abandon singing altogether. Ashley (2015), Freer (2007), and Leck (2009) highlight the related need for further research concerning the experiences of females and their attitudes toward singing at this stage of their development.

Clearly, researchers have found that students are vulnerable during adolescent vocal development and require support to continue singing in a time of dramatic personal change (Young, 2017). Oakes (2008) said that the teacher must "strive to maintain an environment that is a safe place to sing and experiment with the voice" (p. 116). Parker (2007) remarked, "teens are vulnerable in the classroom" but "if an environment is deemed safe and trustworthy… the singing experience will be one that fosters growth of individuals and their voices" (p. 29). Creating this environment might require courage on the part of the teacher to demand and enforce interpersonal respect and the valuing of others as core attributes of classroom discourse (Young, 2009). Richerme (2016) attested to this vulnerability but encouraged that the music classroom could be a place where this vulnerability could lead to valuable growth. Richerme claimed, "Artistic endeavors offer another way in which individuals might experience the openness and uncertainty that can lead to individual self-formation" (p. 32). She found that undertaking artistic endeavors could provoke emotional reactions and uncertainty. Students may have felt "vulnerable" when confronted by "the uncertainty and openness" required to make qualitative judgments in the process of creating or interpreting music (p. 32). Richerme continued that using the same approach in other areas of one's life can "challenge solidified ways of being, thinking, and acting" as part of developing their identity (p. 32). Of course, each student is different. An experience of vulnerability may have enabled growth in one student and hampered it in another. Richerme gave the example of a teacher encouraging students to access experiences of vulnerability when creating music which deals with their personal lives: "Despite the potential growth made possible by such practices, some students may feel so overwhelmed by their emotional exposure that they resist future attempts to consider and reimagine their evolving selves" (p. 32). Richerme found "when students find their vulnerability met with recognition and acceptance from peers or adults, they may feel a sense of connection with those individuals and increased engagement in their work" (p. 34). This was supported by Parker (2007) who relied on Maslow's model of personal growth and claimed "individuals must be permitted to be themselves so that the inner self can be expressed" (p. 28). Richerme cited Gilbert's (2006) call to "invite the foreign into education while making space for the foreign or strange in ourselves" (Richerme, 2016, p. 37). Gilbert (2006) recommended an "unconditional welcome of gayness in education," encouraging teachers to "accept what is not yet intelligible," and claiming that "knowledge or understanding cannot be a precondition of welcome . . . we are to welcome the stranger before we know who or what he or she is" (Gilbert, 2006, p. 27). Richerme (2016) similarly reflected, "Such a welcome, then, depends neither on comfort nor convenience, and it necessitates refraining from immediate judgment" (p. 37). The call to welcome, acceptance, inclusion, and support is found throughout

the related research base (e.g., Beale, 2017; Gurgel, 2023).

Broader Conceptions of Identity and Inclusion

It seems that this call for inclusion has not yet been fully heard. Bond (2017) presented a narrative of Jamey, a gay cis male countertenor who struggled to belong at university because his male alto voice was not accepted or understood. He described being stereotyped and miscategorized as feminine. Characterizing music or music activities as belonging to one gender stereotype automatically excludes others, and broadening approaches to genders in classrooms and rehearsal rooms could be beneficial. This approach would not be aimed at marginalizing the aforementioned "manly men" and "athletes" from the discourse but would "de-gender" music experiences to open them to all. Palkki (2015), discussing male singer identity, suggested that choral conductor-teachers resist outdated conceptions about singing and masculinity and replace them with an inclusive approach that embraces a spectrum of masculinities in the choral context. He believed that practitioners should "stay current with (or even ahead of) trends and social norms to better align with current conceptions" (p. 26). Wells et al. (2012) alleged that "breaking down stereotypes and releasing students from their gender straightjackets" would enable them to "be valued for who they are" (p. 14).

Hess (2016) argued that "the recognition of complex, intersectional identities is crucial to ensuring that we serve our entire student population" (p. 84). Hess noted that teachers and conductors are "uniquely situated at intersections of multiple identities" (p. 84). Accordingly, "understanding" the complex identities of students "facilitates a deeper understanding of the human relations unfolding in education" (p. 84). This deeper understanding of the complexity of identities enables teachers "to account for oppressions that occur at specific intersections that more singular discourses do not represent well" (p. 84). Hess urged us to strive to understand all our students as a matter of social justice.

According to Hess (2016), reflection on our classroom discourse may help prevent our students from suffering "microaggressions" and injustice. Microaggressions constitute small acts, conscious and unconscious which tend to invalidate or denigrate a particular group or identity. These acts culminate in significant harm and ostracism. Furthermore, because "students do not necessarily have choices about the type of 'teacher talk' and representations they encounter in schools" (p. 87), it is important for teachers to reflect on the identities of musicians who are privileged in music classes and those who are invisible. Hess reminded us that students need to be "represented in their classrooms and validated in teacher discourse" to avoid students having to "continually translate teacher discourse to apply to their own lives" (p. 87). This continual need to translate "is a microaggression—a cumulative harm that wears over time" (p. 87).

Demystifying and Empowering Transgender Singers

Conversations concerning transgender students in schools started receiving attention only in the last decade and continue to emerge. Nichols (2013) published the first research study on trans issues in a major music education journal and advocated that transgender students require specialized attention and are at risk of being mistakenly treated in the same way as people who are lesbian, gay, and bisexual. Silveira and Goff (2016) found music teachers' attitudes toward transgender students were overall positive, with female and/or socially liberal teachers being more positive than male and/or socially conservative teachers. Cates (2019) reported that while teachers might have positive intentions to create a safe space, they may fail to do so. In some contexts, change is more difficult than in others, such as conservative institutions (Freer, 2019).

In transgender choral research, it is reported that the relationship between voice and gender identity is dynamic and might evolve as one's gender identity changes. Some transgender singers were comfortable with their voice type not matching their gender identity. Palkki (2020) retold the story of Sara, who exclaimed, "I'm a girl and I'm a bass and I own that." For others, their voice is integral to their gender identity (Palkki, 2017), and the resulting dysphonia could be a cause of distress.

Music educators are often unsure how to assist transgender students (Cayari, 2019). Advocates have asked music educators to create space to demystify transgender singers, empower them to find their individual voice (Cayari, 2019; Palkki & Caldwell, 2018), and to use their voice openly in everyday life (Nichols, 2013). Rastin (2016) went further to claim that both singer and ensemble (or classroom) are harmed if a safe space is not created for singers who identify as transgender. Gender restrictions on voices have resulted in singers not exploring their full vocal range (O'Toole, 1998; Rastin, 2016). An approach that values and empowers all singers regardless of gender identity has the potential to produce more inclusive ensembles, with stronger singers and better performances (Hess, 2016; Rastin, 2016).

Gender Inclusive Approaches

Analysis of this literature revealed four approaches to including diverse gender identities in the choral music classroom: (a) gender-inclusive language, (b) a welcoming environment and supportive mentors, (c) considered and contextualized repertoire choices, and (d) whole group vocal pedagogy sensitive to individual needs. These four approaches are detailed below.

Language

Adopting language that recognizes diverse and evolving gender identities has been suggested as a powerful approach towards an inclusive choral classroom; perhaps even "life changing" for some (Palkki & Caldwell, 2018, p. 36). Hess (2016) recommended strategic choices that educators can make in classroom discourse such that their language and class-

room environment is inclusive and welcoming of all students, stating "language use may be a mere drop in the bucket of anti-oppression, but it is a drop we have the agency to pour" (p. 96). Hess advised:

• Using language around families that does not assume a nuclear model and which includes single parent, single gender and blended families.

• Carefully framing repertoire to avoid "reinscrib(ing) heteronormative and cisgendered conceptions of love and relationships" (p. 94) (for example not automatically assuming in rehearsal/class that all love is heterosexual).

• "Choos(ing) to openly critique … oppressive discourses with the students we teach" (within the confines of our educational institutions) (p. 94).

• Empowering students to "call us out" and "challenge" us if we use "oppressive" language (p. 94).

Palkki (2015) similarly encouraged choral conductors to model "a spectrum of masculinities … through words and actions" (p. 33). For example, he suggested using "a range of analogies, not just sporting ones" (p. 33), to avoid restrictive gendered imagery. He also recommended structuring choral programs to "support choral singing as something that all types of males do" (p. 32), and not "perpetuate restrictive constructions of masculinity" (p. 33). This advice is supported by Hyndman (2021) who advocated that conductors "avoid stereotyping… in repertoire selection and in rehearsal" (p. 20).

Hyndman (2021) asked for "explicit inclusion" and "explicit acceptance" of diverse gender identities. Palkki and Caldwell (2015) found that transgender singers identified gendered solo parts, the avoidance of gender discussion, dress codes, and misgendering as barriers to safe choral education. Accordingly, choral conductors should refer to voice type, not gender, as a way of nurturing a safe space (Hyndman, 2021; Palkki & Caldwell, 2015; Rastin, 2016). Palkki (2017) recommended that choral educators also consider the structure of ensembles to reflect voices rather than genders. It is recommended that names of ensembles to also reflect voice type rather than gender, such as "tenor-bass choir" instead of "men's choir" (Freer, 2023). Teachers' awareness and use of a student's preferred pronouns and chosen name are significant gestures in welcoming diverse gender identities (Bartolome & Stanford, 2017). Teachers should inquire with students about their pronouns upon first meeting in a way that does not publicly "out" them (Palkki, 2020). In some contexts, these recommendations will conflict with current school and government policy. Teachers need to be aware of these policies and their applications, with recognition that each employment situation offers different flexibility around these issues. Still, teachers may find opportunities to advocate for change via their modeling, leadership, and interactions with other teachers (Palkki, 2017).

Choral educators should use inclusive gender language whenever possible, both to avoid politically difficult situations, and to reflect variances in our students' gender identity (Palkki, 2017). Using non-confronting labels for singers of different choral parts is a matter of having respect for others. There is a long English tradition of males singing alto and soprano, so to call the basses "men" and altos "women" has been inaccurate and exclusionary for a long time. It is unnecessary for the conductor to overuse gendered suggestions in rehearsal. Phrases such as "sing like men" are not necessary to produce a "vibrant" choral sound. Such phrases can easily be replaced by phrases such as "sing professionally," "sing like an opera singer," "sing with a music theatre sound," or any other appropriate imagery. This small adjustment in rehearsal vocabulary would mean that more of the singers feel safe and welcomed. However, it is important not to underestimate the challenges for practitioners, singers, and institutions and to respect the positions of all involved. Practitioners may have personal or religious beliefs that contrast with those of their institution, the parent body, or the students. There are difficult ethical considerations and Freer (2019) reminded us to be sensitive to all those involved to avoid "pulling some of us away from practicing our craft and teaching our young singers" (p. 23). He recommended that we respect the diversity of views and encourage conversations that are "grounded in the very real lives of singers and teacher-conductors" (p. 23).

Environment and Mentors

Research on instructional language implicitly encourages teaching environments where students are valued and supported (e.g., Young, 2009, 2017). Indeed, Harrison and Young (2017) claimed that creating a supportive "village" for students is an important reason for forming a singing group (p. 150). Sweet and Parker (2019) stated that "individuals must feel they are in fact important and contributing individuals to the team" (p. 79) and warned practitioners to be sensitive to the tendency of adolescent females to put the needs of the choir ahead of their own. Parker (2018) noted that choir can provide a supportive environment in which vocal identities can grow. Palkki (2017) stated that these safe spaces must be explicitly created while Sweet (2018) added that students need to feel free to "discuss and advocate for their own development" (p. 146). Some research-grounded material concerning male changing voices in choral settings may provide strategies that can be applied to females, including conversations about the voice change, safe environments, risk taking, and teacher awareness (Sweet, 2015). Hyndman (2021) believed "non-gendered" dress codes could make environments more supportive. As well, there is modern support for earlier views (e.g., Freer, 2009) about the importance of mentors as possible future selves. Palkki (2017, 2020) supported the importance of mentors and names teachers as "important others." Overall, nurturing environments and peer support were both strongly supported in the literature reviewed for this article.

Repertoire

Repertoire should be carefully selected and framed in an inclusive choral classroom. Sweet and Parker (2019) found that "choral repertoire helped ground participants' initial [gender] identities but may also have limited their visions of themselves as their experiences grew" (p. 79). Repertoire selection also gives space for composers to voice their lived experiences and for others to listen (Nichols, 2013; Palkki & Caldwell, 2018).

Choral singing involves acting, and singers can be encouraged to take on different personas or identities in their singing for fun, and to investigate, sing in solidarity with, or interrogate other realities than their own (Davis, 1997). People can appreciate a piece of music without automatically advocating, embodying, or adopting the values within it. Indeed, repertoire from outside the cultural context of the singers, can, with contextual explanation and critique, enable students to broaden their understanding of history, culture, and identity and can empower them to develop their own ideas in these areas (Lord, 2011; Schenbeck, 2000). Rather than censoring the choral repertoire, conductors should be purposeful in their choice, be thorough in the teaching of context, and be vigilant in ensuring that students understand how the repertoire intersects, supports, or transgresses cultural values and beliefs. Harrison and Young (2017) claimed "works that express outdated positions or concepts can be problematized as opportunities for learning" (p. 151). This encourages "reading across the grain" or "resistant reading" which is undertaken in some high school English classes (Macken-Horarik & Morgan, 2008). These are techniques which involve interpreting the dominant or expected message of a text and developing alternative understandings. This process enables readers to interrogate the prevailing attitudes and beliefs in a text and to investigate gaps and silences (Behrman, 2006). Reading texts in this way can generate interpretations which are just and inclusive by foregrounding those who have been marginalized (Young, 2017).

Hess (2016) suggested having students "rewrite" texts to "openly critique these oppressive discourses with the students we teach" (p. 90). Accordingly, with appropriate framing and contextualization, repertoire dealing with romantic love could be performed by singers from a range of orientations. It is worth remembering that many of Shakespeare's love sonnets, which have frequently been set to music, did not specify the gender of the beloved (de Grazia, 1999). A contextually situated approach to the material, where resistant reading has been encouraged, is preferable to denying students the right to experience the repertoire. Indeed, Freer believed it would be going too far to "shun…all repertoire reflecting boy/girl romantic relationships" (Freer, 2019, p. 25). Contextualized approaches are better than pretending that some texts do not exist, and sophisticated approaches leave open the possibility of irony or parody in performance. Careful, nuanced repertoire choice should enable singers to develop the full range of musical ability, to inhabit a broad range of emotions and identities and develop a mature understanding of society, and its socio-historical structures (Marini, 2017).

Singing Technique and Choral Pedagogy

Researchers dealing with singers from a range of gender identities have found that some rehearsal techniques previously recommended as suitable for male-changing voices are suitable for voice building regardless of gender identity (Aguirre, 2018; Cayari, 2019; Harrison and Young, (2017). Similarly, Sweet and Parker (2019) noted that universally applicable practices include (a) maintaining an awareness of individual voices through frequent voice checks, (b) engaging in ongoing educational conversations with singers about vocal development, (c) varying choral singers' voice part assignment, and (d) carefully exercising the full vocal range in vocalizes to encourage singers' emerging and individual vocal identities" (p. 79). Hyndman (2021) also recommended flexibility in part assignment across the repertoire and within pieces.

Palkki (2017) reminded us to build on these general approaches, recognizing that "trans people are not monolithic, and when it comes to issues of voice and gender, there are no one-size-fits-all solutions" (p. 25). Both Palkki (2017) and Aguirre (2018) recommended personalized plans for individual voice development, particularly for a trans man. Rastin (2016) and Hyndman (2021) drew links between approaches for adolescent male changing voices and transgender singers. Rastin stated, "It is extremely important that choristers who require vocal rest or other accommodations during vocal transition are supported by the choir director; pushing the fragile voice may cause damage to the vocal system" (2016, p. 31). Good whole-group vocal training should be informed by sensitivity to individual needs.

A more complex issue is that of singing dysphoria, when a singer finds that their identity and their singing voice are in conflict (Rastin, 2016). Freer (2019) noted that this issue places the conductor in a difficult ethical position and counseled that "our primary focus is the singer and how they use their body for vocal production" (p. 27). He reminded us that "when we assume the role of voice teacher, we place the physical production of singing at the center of our curricular and artistic goals" (p. 27). Regardless of gender, orientation, or identity, there are some things that larynxes will not do. A teacher or conductor might be able in a group situation to extend the range of singers somewhat to assist the singer to achieve a sound that coincides better with their identity (within safe bounds during voice change). Beyond that, basses or tenors wishing to sing (or speak) in the alto or soprano range would need specific training to sing in the cricothyroid muscle dominant M2 range (traditionally known as the "counter tenor" range). This sort of training is more the preserve of the speech therapist and voice coach. Freer exclaimed, "it would be pedagogically and ethically inappropriate for us to assign a singer with a treble-clef tessitura to a vocal part that requires a bass-clef tessitura" (p. 28). His point was that it would be ethically wrong to allow our singers to attempt to sing in ranges that are going to compromise the development and ongoing health of their voices. Harrison and Young (2017) reminded us of the need to protect our singers from the embarrassment that could arise from unsuccessful performance experiences. This requires finesse in choral and vocal training as well as performance planning to ensure singers are able to convincingly perform the music chosen and that they perform

to supportive audiences. For Freer (2019), it was an issue of professionalism; conductors and teachers are "qualified to provide voice education and its musical application through choral singing" (p. 28) but not qualified in other areas. Conductors and teachers should reflect on how much they should involve themselves in the private lives of their students and should be careful not to stray into areas for which they are not trained, especially in modern schools where there are specialist pastoral and counselling staff trained to help students encountering identity challenges; a meddling conductor or teacher might unintentionally cause harm and become part of the problem. Freer advocated that we employ "ethical care" within, but not beyond, our field of expertise to enact "a sense of compassion when working with students who face the intersections of singing, gender, and sexuality" (p. 28).

Conclusion

Research reviewed for this article demonstrates that historical gender stereotyping in choral and classroom pedagogy did not nurture an inclusive learning environment. By adopting the approaches discussed in this article, choral conductors may start to create space in their classroom for positive and inclusive student gender identity development. A focus on music making as a primary concern should empower as many people as possible to feel supported and welcomed as singers. An inclusive approach can involve the refinement of rehearsal and classroom discourse together with the sensitive development of voice placement, voice part, and performance attire within the confines of institutional guidelines and contexts. All singers should feel respected by approaches that are taken. A broad range of repertoire should be sensitively interrogated, and interpreted in rehearsal, class, and concert, to empower students to perform choral and other texts from a position of knowledge and understanding. The learning experiences involved in the choral rehearsals may have a significant bearing on the nature of the performance of the repertoire concerned. A sense of mutual respect, patience, care, and goodwill from all concerned—singer, teacher-conductor, carer, and community—should encourage everyone to enjoy the singing.

As a continually evolving field of research, further investigation is required to understand contemporary gender identities, their relationship with other components of the self, and the possible contributions of choral music education. In particular, research is needed to understand how multiple gender identities can be supported and positively co-exist with one another in choral settings. Palkki (2017) reminded us that choral practices are situated "within specific contexts of time, place, politics, and public opinion" (p. 22). As noted at the start of this article, the research in this field is currently dominated by material from Western, largely English-speaking contexts and many voices continue to be marginalized. There is great potential for research from a much greater range of contexts, cultures, and musical traditions, especially nations with strong singing cultures and different social structures to those currently represented. We strongly advocate for research that is situated in practice and that seeks perspectives from children and young people. Further research is needed in transgender vocal production, pedagogy, physiology, and identity (Cayari, 2019). In par-

ticular, further work is needed to investigate the intersection of gender and vocal identity, and the interaction between the physiological and psychological changes that are experienced by transgender singers. Findings from future research have important implications for initial teacher education (Aguirre, 2018) and ongoing teacher support and development (Silveira & Goff, 2016).

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