

A BROTHERHOOD WITH ONE SISTER: A COLLECTIVE CASE STUDY OF  
WOMEN CONDUCTORS OF COLLEGIATE MEN'S CHOIRS

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## **Abstract**

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Despite efforts to create gender equitable work places, there is evidence that gender typecasting and stereotyping is still a large issue in the modern work force. In choral music, there is a multitude of female elementary, middle, and high school directors working with choirs of all types, gender specific and mixed. However, the numbers change dramatically at the collegiate level, showing an absence of women conductors in positions of leadership despite doctoral programs consistently producing more female than male graduates. Collegiate men's choirs have unique and storied traditions dating back to the Civil War era and the founding of many prominent colleges in the United States. The culture of these ensembles is founded around the concepts of fraternity, brotherhood, and a requisite number of drinking songs. The nature and history of these glee clubs has tended to limit access to women conductors. As gender stereotyping and biased hiring practices are challenged in the modern workforce, the choral profession

needs to assert its support of women conducting any type of ensemble, to include those traditionally reserved for men.

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of female conductors of college men's choirs. This research was guided by the following questions: How do women choral conductors describe their motivations for working with college men's choirs? How do these conductors describe the rehearsal environment in their college men's choir? And finally, how do these conductors define the challenges of working with male singers? The following areas provided focus for themes that emerged from the conductor interviews: their motivations, the rehearsal environment, and the challenges associated with a lack of opportunity and quality literature. These areas were also explored in the student interviews and used to provide additional context and perspective to each conductor's case.

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To the cohort at UW – you all have been instrumental in shaping me as a musician, teacher, conductor, scholar, friend. I can't wait to see what the future holds for all of us.

## **Dedication**

To the pioneers, trailblazers, and out-of-the-box thinkers that paved the way for future generations to look at the world as ripe with possibility instead of limitation.

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### **Personal Statement**

My path to a career in music has been anything but traditional. I started out as a student at the Air Force Academy studying to become a doctor and officer in the military. Music has been a part of my life since starting piano lessons and singing in a community children's choir, but never considered it to be a viable career choice. A weekend choir retreat with a conductor from Westminster Choir College changed my life and sent me away from the Air Force and into music. That path led me to attend music classes at the University of Arizona on my lunch hour, singing Italian art songs in my combat boots, participating in the opera chorus with rehearsals in German during my overseas assignment, doing anything I could to stay connected to music.

After five years in the military, a second bachelor's degree and graduate degrees in voice and conducting led me to my first experiences as a choral music educator in Kentucky. Building a high school choral program can be challenging; much is written about how to recruit and retain male singers. Having an abundance of male singers tends to be understood as key to success in secondary choral programs (Freer, 2009). Wanting to be successful and build a strong choral community at my school, I started a men's choir my second year. After three years, this men's choir grew from a ragtag group of about twenty-four boys to a strong, fifty-member ensemble that rivaled the musicianship and artistry of my advanced women's choir.

Men's choir was oftentimes my favorite class to teach. Working with singers of varying levels and abilities—freshmen through senior young men all in the same room—

and being witness to their camaraderie, community, and brotherhood was inspiring. I never thought about my gender as a limitation when I worked with those singers. Having read choral music education texts, I knew that I needed to be cognizant of the issues surrounding the male changing voice. I also knew that as a woman, I needed to enlist the help of men to bridge the potential language and pitch barriers between me and my singers. The idea of women working with men did not seem to be a unique phenomenon until I started to observe how few women actually conducted men's choirs beyond the middle and high school level. In my experience, I found it rare to see women conducting all-state men's honor choir, yet it was not uncommon to see men conducting women's honor choirs. I decided to investigate how many women were actively working with collegiate men's choirs and what led them to that opportunity.

Male glee clubs can often be the oldest singing ensembles on a college campus. They carry with them many traditions and lore connected to their maleness. In recent years many have either disbanded or rebranded themselves as TTBB (tenor and bass) ensembles, or, as in Yale University's case, changed to an SATB (soprano, alto, tenor and bass) ensemble. The idea of a woman infiltrating what some consider the last vestige of a bygone era in choral music is both interesting and trailblazing. I wanted to meet these women and learn about their own backgrounds and career paths. This dissertation records the experiences of three trailblazing women. In order to provide the framework necessary to understand the world of women conductors and collegiate men's choirs, I will begin with brief historical overviews of men's choirs in the United States and women conductors' place in the overall history of conducting.

## **Brief History of College Men’s Choirs in the United States**

*Come and let our swelling song mount like a whirling wind,  
As it meets our singing throng, so blithe of heart and mind.  
Care and sorrow now be gone,  
Brothers in song, sing on!*  
 (“Brothers, Sing On,” 2004)

The lyrics above have been sung by countless male glee clubs around the world ever since Edvard Grieg first set the text to music. Originally performed in 1883 as part of the sixth Giant National Sangerfest, or song festival, in Trondheim, Norway, “Sangerhilsen”—or its English title “Brothers, Sing On!”—epitomizes the European influence on male singing in the United States (Pacific Coast Norwegian Singers Association, 2018). The development of collegiate men’s glee clubs in the United States began as a result of the cultural and political landscape of America during and after the Civil War. Part of that cultural and political landscape is a deeply rooted connection to the *männerchor* traditions of singing clubs in Germany and the English Glee and Catch societies of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century England.

The two most exhaustive and helpful guides on this historic journey are dissertations by Thomas Arnold and Jeremy Jones. Arnold’s dissertation, from the 1960s, was the first of its kind to fully document the history of collegiate men’s choirs in the United States during a time when their future existence was in question. Fifty years later in 2010, Jeremy Jones provided a continuation of the glee club story into the near present day. He detailed clubs that are still in existence, some struggling to find their identity and others holding steadfast to their historical roots. Today, glee clubs are still a vital part of the ever-changing landscape of choral ensembles, even as single-gendered choral ensembles grapple with their place in a culture that is challenging traditional gender norms and the continuum of gender identities.

Prior to the Civil War, documented musical activity in the United States was rooted in the psalm singing of the pilgrims (Regier, 1963). Books of psalms were published starting in 1640 with the *Bay Psalm Book*, followed by the organization of singing schools as early as 1717 in Boston (p. 14). One of the few American composers of note at this time was William Billings, whose fuguing tunes and arrangements of psalms gained notoriety and started a movement of part-singing in the church. As the Napoleonic Wars heated up in Europe, German immigrants coming to the United States to escape the turmoil at home brought with them their love of community singing. The German männerchor tradition has its roots in trade societies, such as the Masonic Lodge (Trame, 1993). Men would gather in pubs and restaurants to sing about hunting, women, love, and love of country. By the turn of the eighteenth and into the nineteenth centuries, most of the major cities in Germany had these types of community groups. The songs they sang were not meant to be overtly sophisticated pieces of music. However, they did often incorporate texts by the great poets of the day, including Schiller and Goethe (Ray, 1962).

Besides männerchor groups, the *liederkranz*, literally crown of song, consisted of men with more education and skill who performed in *sangerfests* and song festivals. Mendelssohn, Schubert, Schumann, Brahms, and Bruckner are composers of note who wrote for these societies (Ray, 1962, p. 25). Most of the music written for the männerchor and liederkranz in Germany were new compositions that had been commissioned or contributed through competitions by the societies to be performed at these sangerfests (Jones, 2010). Anton Bruckner conducted and wrote music for a liederkranz in Linz for a few years, including a large-scale work entitled *Helgoland* that was reported to have over

2,000 singers at its premiere (p. 20). Like Bruckner, Brahms wrote two extensive works for men's choir and orchestra—the *Alto Rhapsody* and *Rinaldo*. Mendelssohn wrote the *Festgesang*, op. 68 also for men's choir and orchestra in 1840, along with seventeen male chorus works ranging from sophisticated texts by Goethe to drinking songs (Trame, 1993).

Around the same time, England was struggling to find its musical identity after the death of Handel. In an attempt to bring the madrigal back into vogue, musicians and composers started writing *glees*, or simple, mostly homophonic, a cappella part-songs written for men (Ray, 1962). Just like in Germany, community pub singing cultures existed in England, though they were present more often among members of the nobility and upper-class society. In 1761, the Noblemen and Gentlemen's Catch club was founded in London. According to Jones, this "London organization sought to promote both the musical merits of composition and singing and the joviality and camaraderie of drink" (Jones, 2010, p. 12). Composers were encouraged to submit glees and *catches*—another form of a cappella singing—into contests supported by the clubs with cash prizes to encourage the writing of these pieces. Like glees, catches are short pieces of music written for men. However, unlike glees, catches are not through-composed part-songs, but rather rounds, usually for three or more people. Additionally, their subject matter often revolved around drinking and sex, oftentimes making their goal to be as crude as possible (p. 10). The music was not meant to be sophisticated but intended instead to be easily taught and remembered.

While catches were the bawdy, less-sophisticated art form, glees provided composers with an opportunity to write more elevated part-songs that have lived on

beyond the confines of the club scene in England. Samuel Webbe composed over 200 glees, earning him the title of “father of the glee” (p. 13). His composition *Glorious Apollo* opened every meeting of the Noblemen and Gentlemen’s Catch Club and has found its way on to many American glee club programs. Additional notable composers that helped cultivate this part-song tradition include Charles Stanford (1852–1924), Edward Elgar (1857–1934), Gustav Holst (1874–1934), and Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872–1958) (p. 14). The glees in England slowly went out of fashion after World War I but helped to redefine English choral music, keeping the part-song tradition alive.

The influence and culture of Europe journeyed with the hundreds of thousands of immigrants that came to the United States in the nineteenth century to escape their war-torn countries. Starting in 1815 and cresting in 1854, a mass migration of immigrants helped solidify the founding and development of numerous colleges in the United States (Ray, 1962). Many German students immigrated to the United States, bringing their songs and traditions with them. Roughly 200,000 ended up fighting for the Union Army during the Civil War. After the war ended, these same students and immigrants entered college in the United States. The Harvard Glee Club was officially founded in 1858 as a student organization, soon followed by the Michigan Glee Club in 1859 and the Yale Glee Club in 1861.

The musical canon or repertoire of these early college glee clubs in the United States, like *Glorious Apollo* and *Brothers, Sing On!* to name a few, stemmed directly from the English glee and German männerchor traditions. Along with their music, some of the communal and bawdy characteristics of the European singing societies translated into academia as extracurricular, not for credit classes. Additionally, they were mostly

student run ensembles and historically known for being of very low quality. Their focus was to provide entertainment around campus; they often teamed up with mandolin and banjo groups to perform minstrel-type shows of popular tunes and songs about their individual colleges (Jones, 2010). It was not until the early 1900s that members of the Harvard Glee Club approached Archibald Davison, who was working for the college chapel at the time, to conduct their ensemble. Over the course of a few years, he slowly began to change the culture of the group by incorporating more traditional, classically-based choral music, focusing on quality and musicianship. Yale followed suit soon after with the appointment of Marshall Bartholomew as the director. Under his leadership Yale started performing traditional choral music from the Renaissance and Baroque periods, as well. They often partnered with the Radcliffe Choral Society to present major works like Handel's *Messiah* with a full orchestra (Trame, 1993). The focus of the ensembles changed to one of quality and substance, while maintaining connections to their history of lighter music and college alma mater songs. They were ambassadors for their institutions, and their alumni helped keep the ensembles funded, as most maintained their status as a club instead of a curricular group.

One of the most important developments that helped spread collegiate glee clubs nationwide was the establishment of the Intercollegiate Music Council (IMC) in 1913 by Albert Pickernell, a graduate of the Harvard Glee Club (p. 24). The IMC established annual competitions between glee clubs across the country. These competitions created the impetus for many groups to work on the quality of their musicianship and performance. The competitions continued until the outbreak of World War I, when many of the men in the ensembles went to war and groups folded. However, when the veterans

returned to school using the GI Bill, the glee clubs saw a resurgence in participation and an increase in the quality of singing due in large part to the older age of the student veterans. At the same time, colleges of music were being formed at most universities, and some glee clubs became curricular classes providing students credit for participation. With their incorporation into music departments, many glee clubs changed their names to “male chorus” or “men’s chorus” (p. 27). Conversely, many glee clubs were forced out of colleges to pave the way for more SATB (mixed voice) ensembles due to the increased enrollment of women.

In order to maintain their relevancy and support, prominent glee clubs like Michigan, Georgia, Yale, and Harvard traveled extensively overseas and in the United States. Additionally, the IMC reformed after World War II and currently exists as the Intercollegiate Men’s Choruses (p. 26). It includes secondary school ensembles, GALA (Gay and Lesbian Association), and community men’s choirs. The IMC hosts a biannual conference but no longer hosts a singing competition. Today, glee clubs and men’s choruses continue to play an integral role in the choral music landscape of colleges in the United States. Not all of them have maintained ties to their historical roots. For example, when women were admitted to Yale in the 1970s, the glee club changed its designation from an all-male ensemble to include to an SATB ensemble open to the newly accepted female students.

Just like Yale, Harvard University’s glee club has decided to modernize in light of cultural shifts surrounding gender definition. Recently announced, the Harvard Glee Club will no longer be limited to male singers but is open to anyone who identifies with the tenor or bass voice part (Graf, 2016). This illustrates a move that many ensembles are

making to become more inclusive of their students' gender identities. Despite the less traditional gender-based definitions used for TTBB ensembles, some glee clubs are finding creative ways to maintain their unique personas and identities based on their own college's history and culture.

## **Brief History of Women Conductors**

*“Your daughter’s a talented conductor. Too bad she doesn’t wear pants.”  
Dean of the School of Music, Indiana University, 1947 (Hinely, 1984)*

It is hard to imagine a Dean of a school of music declaring the above statement to any parents about their graduate daughter. Yet, in 1947 the parents of Margaret Hillis—now a legendary conductor in both choral and orchestral music—were told just that on the day of her graduation from Indiana University. Current conceptions of the professional conductor are a fairly modern phenomenon, having come to prominence in the middle of the nineteenth century (Cheng, 1998). Before then, conductors in the seventeenth century consisted of the organist or harpsichordist and composers. By the end of that century, the first violinist began to function as the leader. It was not until the 1830s that a conductor stood independently in front of an orchestra holding a baton like modern conductors (p. 82). A hundred years later, Antonia Brico would change the world of music as the first woman to conduct the Berlin Philharmonic (p. 82). Nadia Boulanger, the famous composition teacher of numerous prominent composers of the twentieth century, became the first woman to conduct the Boston Symphony Orchestra and the New York Philharmonic. The accomplishments of these women are noteworthy considering that music schools such as Juilliard did not start accepting women into graduate conducting programs until the 1960s (p. 82).

Women have always been a part of the world of music, often in the shadows and most definitely not on the conductor’s podium. In her article “The Uphill Climb of Women in American Music,” Professor Mary Brown Hinely documents the tenacity of the early twentieth-century women conductors (1984). Conductors like Antonia Brico of the Women’s Symphony of Boston and Ethel Leginska of the Women’s Symphony of

New York created their own all-female orchestras to create opportunities for themselves when the doors to professional orchestras were still sealed shut (Hinely, 1984). Out of the three types of musical ensembles with conductors—orchestra, band and choir—choral music has been more open to women conductors. Because of this, women conductors who wanted to work outside of choral music had to be creative in how they made opportunities for themselves. For example, Margaret Hillis famously studied choral conducting as an alternative path to the orchestral conductor's podium (Cheng, 1998). But all women conductors' "inescapable difference from the male norm defines them as Other" (Bartleet, 2008, p. 6). This status of "other" has required women conductors to navigate tasks such as adapting their dress, gesture, behavior, leadership style, and even their own femininity to prove their musicianship and ability (p. 6).

Women band conductors have in some ways had the hardest hill to climb for access to leadership positions. In their article, "What's Color is Your Baton, Girl? Gender and Ethnicity in Band Conducting," researchers Deborah Sheldon and Linda Hartley report that in 2009 women made up only 10.13% of the college band director population (Sheldon and Hartley, 2012). As low as that number may seem, it had actually doubled since Gould's 2003 survey that reported only 5% of university band directors were women (p. 40). In order to study gender trends relating to the band conductor, Sheldon and Hartley collected data from Midwest Band and Orchestra Clinics dating from 1947 to 2008. The results found that only 7.56% of Midwest conductors were women and 92.44% were men (p. 42). The study showed that the majority of performing ensembles conducted by these women were in middle schools when they broke down ensembles types further (p. 43). Gould attributes part of the absence of women in collegiate band

positions to their lack of representation in the high school bands, as well (Gould, 2003). She found that gender and the primary instrument played by the applicant were the most important factors in the selection of candidates for high school instrumental positions (p. 1).

In order to gain a deeper understanding for the lack of women in band conducting, Gould studied band history in the United States beginning prior to the American Revolution. According to her, bands were initially associated with the military. Even into the nineteenth century, civilian organized bands were comprised of and conducted by men (p. 7). In fact, the term “military band” tended to refer to any wind band. Since college bands were established around the same time as the rise of these civilian bands, they were often closely associated with military training courses and activities conducted exclusively by men (p.7). In the twentieth century, women were sometimes admitted to concert bands, but most of their opportunities occurred when the men were gone during the two World Wars. Once the men returned, women were again excluded from participation. Marching band was especially hard on women, purporting discipline problems with mixed-sex ensembles and that “women’s smaller stature caused uniformity problems in marching” (p. 7). It was not until the passage of Title IX legislation in 1972 that it was no longer legal to bar women from participation (p. 7). Because women were so far behind in their marching band experiences, they were deemed insufficiently prepared to conduct college bands (p. 7).

Women in band conducting have had to overcome years of exclusion from participation based on their gender, whereas singing and choral music are often characterized as a feminine activity. In Nannen’s 2017 dissertation “‘Choir is For Girls:’

Intersectional Mixed Methods Perspectives on Adolescent Gender Identity, Singing Interest, and Choral Music Participation,” she states that a shift has taken place over the last century where public singing went from being a male dominated activity in colonial America to one looked at as almost exclusively feminine and therefore unacceptable for many men (Nannen, 2017). Even though women choral conductors dominate the field in elementary music education, when it comes to positions of leadership and power, they have been and continue to be in the minority. This is especially true in professional choral ensembles and collegiate positions. In her collection of interviews with choral professionals, *In Quest of Answers*, Glenn posed the following question: “Are you aware of any difficulties that women conductors may have in a male-oriented profession?” (Glenn, 1991, p. 129). Conductor Richard Cox stated emphatically, “It’s very clear to me that this is a problem. . . . It is certainly less of a problem in the public-school system, but it is still a problem at the college and professional levels” (p. 129). Eph Ehly mused that it might be a problem for both genders depending on the circumstances, stating, “In my program I have many women. My wife teases me and says that my women are the better conductors” (p. 129). Iva Dee Hiatt pointed out that she felt lucky to have such great mentors in her career that helped to ensure that she had opportunity and success. Hiatt explained, “When times have been rough, I’ve thought of those men who had faith in me and who helped me in so many ways. Their encouragement was vital to me at the time I needed it most” (p. 130)

Colleen Kirk reiterated the barriers that exist for women in academia. She explains, “Women conductors in a male-oriented profession face discrimination in job placement. To be appointed director of choral activities in a first-rate college situation,

women must be at least twice as competent as her average male counterparts” (p. 131). More information and statistics illustrating the status of women choral conductors in academia will be addressed in chapter two. Of special interest to this project was the quote by Jameson Marvin, famed director of the Harvard Glee Club. According to him, “most adults are taking (or should be taking) the view that a good conductor is a good conductor. Gender is irrelevant to the bottom-line prerequisite of musicianship and personal positive energy” (p. 133). Marcella Lee’s 1977 article for the *Choral Journal* states the problem best when she muses, “I wonder where the women went. I mean the young women who were top in their college classes in the field of vocal music education. What happened to them? Why have they not risen to the top of their profession?” (Lee, 1977, p. 36). Forty years later, the question remains, which makes the women in this study and their unique positions in the choral profession important.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study is to learn about the experiences of female conductors of college men's choirs and their singers, focusing on the motivation for the conductors' and singers' participation in a male chorus, perceived challenges associated with working with the male voice, and their rehearsal environment. The primary areas discussed in this literature review are (a) how gender roles, gender typecasting, and unconscious bias play out in the choral classroom; (b) what studies have to report on the status of women choral conductors in academia; (c) what studies have to say about single gender education and the "missing males" phenomenon in choral music; and (d) what studies have to say about male singers' motivations for participation in choral ensembles.

#### **Gender and Music**

Feminist researcher Elizabeth Gould proposes that "gender is inherent in all aspects of the music education profession: musical instruments, occupations, materials, pedagogies and preferences" (Gould, 2004, p. 67). Her research focuses on the exclusionary and segregated practices that constrain the musical and educational growth of both students and teachers. Feminist theory is not widely used in music outside of musicology perhaps because it "challenges the profession to address the ways in which gender is inherent so that we may identify and implement approaches for change that are grounded in the material conceptions of everyday life" (p. 67). Yet, the importance of feminism to music education cannot be overestimated as it provides "ways of thinking differently about issues that we take for granted in the profession, enabling us to move into alternative ways of being" (p. 68). Recent scholars who have tackled issues of gender

and music specifically regarding conductors include Claudia Ann Bryan (*Women Choral Conductors in the Academy: A Case Study*, 2016), Kelly Gathen (*Gender Bias and Music Education*, 2014), and Anna Edwards (*Gender and the Symphonic Conductor*, 2015).

These dissertations focus on choral conductors, band conductors, and orchestral conductors, respectively. Through the use of qualitative and quantitative research that includes interviews with women conductors, these studies add to the recent literature on gender in music as it applies to the lived experiences of women professionals in the field.

In the introduction to her ground-breaking 1997 book *Music, Gender, and Education*, prominent researcher and author on gender in music, Lucy Green states

Any commentary on the practices of people selected according to their sex necessitates some definition of what sex is assumed to mean. This may seem fairly obvious at first, but it quickly becomes problematic. The discourse on sex begs the question of where biological determinants end and historical constructs begin. Whereas some things clearly appear to be biologically determined, such as reproductive organs, others, such as capacity for empathy, do not... The distinguishing lines between women and femininity, man and masculinity are blurred, and yet distinction is invoked, implicitly if not explicitly, as soon as we begin to speak of women musicians, or men musicians (Green, 1997, p. 11).

Green argues that women naturally fulfilled their feminine roles by teaching music instead of performing it due to the historical constructs of femininity. In fact, by the late nineteenth century, women outnumbered men as professional musicians because the vast majority of them were involved in private teaching (p. 47). Since conducting falls into the categories of performance and leadership, women conductors are understood as inherently working against their culturally accepted gender role. These gender roles start

early on in our music education, as illustrated by Green through an ethnographic study of a music classroom in England. In this study, Green reveals how girls' and boys' participation in music education, specifically vocal music, reinforced gendered musical practices and meanings. Her belief is that an "awareness of gendered musical meaning and of its influential presence within our musical experiences, must in and of itself be the first necessity and the last objective of any intervention" (p. 257).

This awareness and quest for understanding has manifested itself in a few studies, specifically on the gendered selection of musical instruments in band classrooms. For example, Kelly Gathen sought to explore the influences that effect a person's instrument selection by interviewing two female band directors about their own experience selecting their primary instrument and how that decision potentially affected other musical career decisions (2014). Gathen references a study from 1981 by Griswold and Chrobak that characterized flute, clarinet, and choral teachers as "feminine" while guitar, trumpet, and instrumental teachers were classified as "masculine" (Gathen, 2014). These gender stereotypes and societal norms can unconsciously influence musical decisions, potentially limiting future opportunities and choices.

Recalling Gould's assertion that teaching fulfills a societally accepted feminine role, music education, therefore, can also be thought of as an inherently feminine activity:

In music education, most elementary music teachers are women while most college band directors are men. Historically, this has been true since elementary and secondary education were formally separated, and public-school bands and college bands were first organized. Women nurture young children in their early music education, while men produce highly competitive, award winning bands (Gould, 2003, p. 1).

This quote demonstrates the power gender roles and stereotypes (women as nurturers) can play in determining the career path women were directed toward (elementary education) and away from (conductor/leaders). According to Sondra Howe's book *Women Music Educators in the United States*, 83% of teachers in 1918 were women because they were cheaper to hire, and men had many other occupational opportunities (Howe, 2014). The first exposure to music that many children experience in school is in elementary classrooms and through group songs. Singing in school is therefore where many students first interact with music education. Consequently, since most of their models were female, choral music took on a feminine identity.

Recent demographic studies in music education show that not much has progressed in regard to gender roles since the early twentieth century. In 2001 the Music Educators National Conference (MENC) compiled gender data that revealed that female choral educators outnumbered their male counterparts by a margin of two to one. However, when the teaching levels were examined further it was revealed that the majority of women occupied positions in the preschool through high school positions (VanWeelden, 2003). In the 2009 book, *Wisdom, Wit and Will: Women Conductors on their Art*, conductor Sharon Hansen explains the positionality of female choral conductors:

Historically, women have been visible and well accepted as choral conductors primarily only within the realm of elementary, middle school, small high school, small college, or sectarian institutions...as children's choir directors (although not typically boy choir directors), as junior high and middle school choir directors, as women's chorus directors, and as training choir directors (Hansen, 2009, p. 214).

It is interesting to note that despite the feminine identity of choral music, the American Choral Directors Association—which was founded in 1959 to ‘promote excellence in choral music through performance, composition, publication, research and teaching’ has only had five female national presidents (Conlon, 2009).

In order to gain perspective on how music compares to other professions, it is useful to examine other career fields to see the status of women who are also challenging traditional gender roles. According to the 2003 article, “Cracks in the Glass Ceiling,” women occupied 44% of management jobs in American companies, but the top management positions were predominately filled by men with statistics upwards of 97% (Goodman, Fields & Blum, 2003). The continued exclusion of women from those top echelons of the business world is evidence of a glass ceiling or “a barrier that appears invisible but is strong enough to hold women back from top-level jobs merely because they are women rather than because they lack job-relevant skills, education or experience” (p. 476). While women are making strides to break through the proverbial glass ceiling in order to obtain equal opportunities for employment, biased decision-making processes still exist at the highest levels of management. Factors of this bias include dominance of white men in management, lack of mentors and role models for women in organizations, and widespread discrimination limiting women’s opportunities to enter top management ranks (p. 477). The experiences of women choral conductors at the college level will be examined as part of this literature review as a parallel to breaking through the glass ceiling of high-level management positions in corporate America.

Another interesting parallel to women conductors is women coaches of male sports teams. According to the National Collegiate Athletic Association’s 2012 gender

equity report, within NCAA Division I institutions the average number of full-time male coaches for men's teams was 119 while the average number of full time female coaches for men's teams was 14 (Light, 2013). Division II institutions had 278 and 29, respectively. Conversely, there were 265 male head coaches of women's teams and 252 female head coaches of women's teams. Most of the female head coaches of men's teams came from sports that were viewed as "gender neutral" such as cross country, track and field, or volleyball (p. 6). By examining women coaches of male sports, Light is able to provide a concrete example of the principles of role congruity theory in action. This theory states that there are

qualities and behavioral tendencies that are believed to be mandatory for each sex as well as expectations about the roles that women and men should occupy. Females are stereotypically associated with communal traits and men are more agentic. Communal traits are: compassionate, helpful, kind, sympathetic, sensitive, nurturing. Agentic traits that are typically associated with men are aggressive, forceful, self-confident and self-sufficient (Light, 2013, p. 5).

Light references several previous studies (Hardin et al, 2008; Norman, 2010) showing that women were most successful when they integrated themselves into the preexisting culture of coaching rather than challenging it; they had to accept the field as men's turf and their own status as an outsider (p. 9). This current study hopes to ascertain whether women conductors working with male choirs experience the same challenges of working in a historically male gendered role.

## **Unconscious Bias**

According to the University of California at San Francisco's Diversity website, "unconscious bias is defined as social stereotypes about certain groups of people that individuals form outside their own conscious awareness" (Navarro, 2018). Biases can be based on "skin color, gender, age, height, weight, introversion versus extroversion, marital and parental status, disability status, foreign accents, where someone went to college and more. If you can name it, there is probably an unconscious bias for it" (McCormick, 2016). The research into unconscious bias in music has focused largely on the effect of blind auditions to improve equity in orchestras. A 2000 study by Claudia Goldin and Cecilia Rouse found that use of a screen increased the probability that a woman would be advanced and hired, subsequently increasing the proportion of women in symphony orchestras (Goldin and Rouse, 2000). Before the use of blind auditions, the music director selected the majority of orchestra players. The change in audition procedures accounted for a twenty-five percent increase of women orchestra musicians (p. 716).

The use of a "blind" audition model takes gender, and therefore any potential bias associated with gender, out of the decision-making process. However, what if a situation is not blind? In her article for the *Scientific American*, Dr. Claire Pomeroy defines unconscious bias as "micro assaults that women (scientists) are forced to endure daily. This is the endless barrage of purportedly insignificant sexist jokes, insults and put-downs that accumulate over years and undermine confidence and ambition" (Pomeroy, 2016, p. 11). She goes on to say that unconscious bias occurs every time a woman is ignored in a meeting when she has made a recommendation that is praised and supported minutes later when made by a man.

Biases not only affect how we view individuals and their abilities, but they can also cause one to self-eliminate from potential job and career opportunities. An article about the lack of women instrumentalists in the music scene in England blamed the absence of female role models on the gender disparity. In it Noble writes, “the fewer women there are performing regularly, the less likely young girls will pick up an instrument in the first place” (Noble, 2018). The same argument is made for the disparity between the amount of female graduate students compared to high level female faculty. “When these high achieving women students look around campus for faculty mentors and role models,” writes Curtis, “what do they find? At only 28 percent of all full professor appointments, women are still outnumbered more than two to one in the most senior rank” (Curtis, 2011, p. 1). This lack of female role models in higher education and leadership creates a self-fulfilling prophecy. Additionally, personal and professional biases can potentially limit what is perceived as possible in regard to careers and positions, as described by Gresham:

[I]t is particularly unfortunate when women fail to appreciate the complexity of their diverse personas, opting instead to set boundaries which have limited relevance for the majority of women whose support must be cultivated if change is to occur. This time we have identified the ‘Others,’ but they are also us (Gresham, 2009, p. 7).

Do women conductors limit the types of ensembles they conduct because of these unconscious biases? There have been some studies of women conductors that concluded that there is a need for women to assert or prove themselves to their ensembles in this traditionally male dominated role (Bartleet, 2008). Perhaps that is a contributing factor to the continued gender disparity witnessed in the world of professional ensembles.

## **Status of Women Choral Conductors in Academia**

There are numerous articles written on equity and the effects of unconscious bias on women in academia, specifically their gross underrepresentation in positions of power and disparities in pay. The world of choral music is no different. In her 1991 master's thesis, "The Current Status of Women Choral Conductors at the Collegiate Level," followed two years later by an article co-authored with Kay Norton entitled "Women Choral Conductors at the Collegiate Level: Status and Perspectives," Lori Hetzel set out to discover which doctoral choral conducting institutions employed at least one female choral conductor. Through surveys sent out to women collegiate choral directors, Hetzel and Norton ascertained that only 10.1% of the 276 conductors surveyed taught at universities with graduate programs (Hetzel & Norton, 1993). Fifteen years later, Sharon Hansen's chapter in the book *Wisdom, Wit, and Will: Women Choral Conductors on their Art* outlined the challenges women professors continue to face as university professors, focusing specifically on the tenure and promotion process (Conlon, 2009). The statistics used in the chapter are from VanWeelden's 2003 demographic profile on choral music programs and conductors in American postsecondary institutions. These statistics show that men conducted 1,759 choral ensembles where women conducted 538 choral ensembles. Additionally, men comprised 83% of the director of choral activities positions, while women comprised only 17% of these positions. It is interesting to note that when both men and women were present at an institution, over half of the women conducted women-only ensembles. These numbers are troubling in and of themselves; coupled with the fact that women have outnumbered men as students, comprising 57% of

undergraduate enrollment and 59% of graduate enrollment as of 2009, these numbers show that gender discrimination is still an issue (Curtis, 2011).

The passage of Title IX in 1972 along with Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 were meant to mitigate institutional discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, and national origin (Hansen, 2009). The verbiage of Title IX states, “No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance” (p. 187). While the legislation itself helped make discrimination against the law, there was little agreement between lawmakers as to the best methods to ensure compliance. But access to equal opportunity does not ensure success. In fact, as of 2006, women still represented a distinct minority of tenured and tenure-track faculty members, holding only 24% of full professor positions across the United States (p. 196). Moreover, the average salary of female faculty members was on average just 81% of what men earned (p. 197).

In her article, “More Faculty Diversity, Not on Tenure Track” for *Inside Higher Ed*, Colleen Flaherty uses data from the National Center for Higher Education Statistics 2013 “Taking the Measure of Faculty Diversity Study” to illustrate the following results: women faculty appointments are increasing across the board, but where the most growth is occurring is a bit alarming: “the magnitude of women’s growth in full-time and tenured or tenure-track appointments pales in comparison to their growth in part-time appointments, however, at about 44 percent and full-time, non-tenure-track appointments, at about 22 percent” (Flaherty, 2016). At the highest level of faculty ranking, the full

professorship, “fewer than one in 10 faculty women, about 9 percent have achieved it” (Flaherty, 2016).

As outlined in the previous sections, gender roles and bias have proven to be problematic for women professors’ ability to gain promotion and tenure. This is manifested in women choral conductors continuing to lag behind their male colleagues in roles such as director of choral activities. Some of the sex-biased behaviors that confront female professors, and specifically conductors, include:

- Women are expected to be more warm and motherly.
- Women are supposed to make people feel good, to be emotional soothers.
- Women are expected to smile, be friendly, and not look serious.
- Women are not supposed to challenge students or make them feel uncomfortable.
- Women are not expected to be strong, dynamic, or intellectual teachers (Hansen, 2009, p. 190).

While these biased behaviors are detrimental to all female professors, female conductors face an uphill battle in particular in order to successfully lead an ensemble. Hansen adds a personal observation stating that “female conductors who lead with strength and assertiveness are ‘bitches,’ but men who lead in such a manner are ably powerful and bold” (p. 191). In order for women conductors to overcome these barriers to success, better mentorship must exist between experienced faculty and the younger generation of up-and-coming professors.

Recent scholarship surrounding female choral conductors includes Janet Brenneman’s 2007 dissertation, “Footsteps of my Own: Gender Issues that Influence the Formative Experiences of Exemplary Women Choral Conductors” and Claudia Bryan’s 2016 dissertation, “Women Choral Conductors in the Academy: A Case Study.”

Brenneman's study used individual, in-depth interviews and personal experiences of three exceptional women conductors to "explain the influence of past teaching, learning, and performing experiences on the current teaching practices of exceptional women choral conductors confirming the importance of women role models and mentors in choral music education" (Brenneman, 2007, p. 42). Similarly, through the in-depth study of four female directors of choral activities, focusing on their educational and career paths, possible struggles and/or discrimination, and sources of support, Bryan hoped to empower other young women choosing a field of study to follow similar paths to success (Bryan, 2016). Both these dissertations provide real stories from real women in the field who are living and finding success in the choral profession. It is my hope that this project will also provide other women conductors the inspiration to imagine new opportunities in the choral profession.

### **Single Gender Education and Men's Choir**

The use of single-gendered general education classes is not a new pedagogical practice. Its implementation in the United States has been met with mixed results. Most of the research comparing single-sex and coeducational schools occurred in countries such as Australia, Great Britain, and Thailand, primarily because there were a large number of single-sex schools sponsored by the government (Ramsey, 2013). Parochial and private schools in the United States have maintained this model of teaching for many years with great success. However, it can be a more controversial subject when implemented in public schools. After passage of the educational reform No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, a provision was made to allow the option for single-sex classrooms in public schools, specifically in math and science classes (p. 20). There were many rules

associated with the implementation of these classrooms. For example, “they must be voluntary, must have an important objective such as to improve educational achievement of the students, and they must be reevaluated every two years to make sure they are meeting federal requirements” (Jorgensen and Pfeiler, 2008, p. 36). Single-sex classrooms have had mixed results in demonstrating gains in student achievement. Some studies have shown an increase in the growth and abilities of girls and a decline in boys in the classroom, while others have seen an increase in off-task and negative classroom behavior from both sexes (Spielhagen, 2013).

Physician Leonard Sax, a major proponent and founder of the National Association for Single Sex Education, asserts that teachers need to take advantage of the differences between the sexes and tailor their teaching methods to embrace these differences because boys’ and girls’ brains are wired differently (Jorgensen and Pfeiler, 2008). This philosophy is a commonly accepted practice used to promote gender specific vocal instruction in the choral classroom, especially for middle and high school singers. Because of the large number of girls involved in singing, many high schools have beginning treble choirs to accommodate an overflow of female singers from their mixed voice ensembles. It is also becoming common to have a beginning male ensemble at the high school level as well. Both of these groups can help provide the focus needed to work on vocal technique that is specific to the gender of the singers.

When male ensembles are allowed to exist in a school, they have been shown to increase the retention of male singers, the quality of their singing, and the esprit de corps of the males in the choir (Ramsey, 2013). In her article on the female teacher’s perspective on teaching middle and high school male-only ensembles, Jana Williams

states the advantages of male-only choruses as “males not feeling like a minority, peer support, more comfort with vocal change issues, repertoire more easily tailored to vocal needs, repertoire more geared to male tastes, and fewer disruptive behavioral issues” (Williams, 2012, p. 21). Audience support and accolades from female classmates are also motivators for boys to have a positive attitude about singing in choir. Currently there is not any literature written specifically about the experiences of collegiate men in single-gendered classrooms. However, single-sex choirs can afford singers of any age the opportunity to explore a variety of repertoire specifically written for separate male and female voices (Ramsey, 2013).

Since choral music and singing are often identified as feminine activities, choral teachers have seemingly always struggled with how to recruit men. In Julia Koza’s article “The ‘Missing Males’ and Other Gender Issues in Music Education: Evidence from the ‘Music Supervisors’ Journal,’ 1914-1924,” a 1918 high school teacher’s campaign to encourage more male enrollment in his program. His campaign demonstrates how far some teachers would go to attract male singers even at the expense of alienating their female students, as further evidenced through the following questionnaire:

Are you one of those people who considers Music effeminate?

1. All the great composers were men.
2. The great Symphony Orchestras of the world are composed of men players and are conducted by men. The personnel of a modern Symphony Orchestra consist of 80 or 90 men.
3. Many churches in the larger cities have their music supplied by choirs of men and boys under a male organist and director.
4. The men who are playing and singing on the Concert stage and in Grand Opera have to be and are men of splendid physique and considerable

intellectual attainment. They are the physical equals of the best football and baseball players (Koza, 1993, p. 221).

It is hard for modern readers to believe that this would be an acceptable way to advertise and attract boys to choir. Yet even today teachers struggle with “missing males” in their choral programs. Another article by Koza examined choral music textbooks from 1982 to 1992 searching for how gender-related issues were explained and addressed. She found that, in general, references to gender reflected and reinforced discourses that are both misogynistic and homophobic, contributing to the continued oppressions of women and gay men (Koza, 2010). Current discourse in the profession surrounding how to attract more male singers is based on gender stereotypes that have been reinforced through these choral textbooks and, more than likely, do not reflect the realities of modern male students.

Some of these commonly accepted explanations for the shortages of males include:

- The perception that singing is not an appropriately masculine activity deflects boys away from choral programs.
- Choral programs have not catered to male interests and preferences; successful directors/teachers take male interests into consideration; unsuccessful ones do not.
- The voice change sidetracks boys.
- Boys avoid singing because they perceive it to be unrelated to their future career plans (p. 51).

Many of these commonly accepted explanations pit feminine and masculine gender expressions against each other. Female teachers have been internalizing the rhetoric that they must play down their femininity in order to successfully relate with their male students and encourage retention of these students in their choral programs. Although no

text openly blames teachers for the shortage, several indicated that it was not only within the power of teachers to solve the problem but was also their responsibility to do so (p. 54). Since the majority of elementary and secondary choral teachers are women, it is not a stretch to read these indictments of female teachers as the cause for so few male singers in choral music.

It has not been until recently that choral music as a profession has begun to address these long-held gender biases and started to address the rhetoric on “missing males” and other gender issues. In his article, “Gender Troubles Males, Adolescents and Masculinity in the Choral Context,” Josh Palkki asks choral conductor-teachers to reflect on whether the “male choir paradigm perpetuates antiquated stereotypes and if so, whom do these stereotypes affect?” (Palkki, 2015). Palkki suggests adopting a more inclusive approach that embraces a “spectrum of masculinities” in the choral context to better serve all singers (p. 26). The research by Palkki and Ramsey has helped to modernize the pedagogical approach needed to successfully serve today’s students. For example, Ramsey’s interviews with high school male singers provided several insights to the thoughtfulness of the students. As one student explained, “One thing we really loved about (choir) was that we got to talk about deep poetry and be vulnerable. And as a high school guy, that’s not something I think we found anywhere else – that vulnerability and ability to talk openly about emotion” (Ramsey, 2013, p. 132). Choral conductor-teachers must recognize that the accepted social constructs surrounding gender and gender expression may differ greatly from the teacher’s own experiences in school. More current research is needed into the choral experiences of all persons and their expressions of gender to ensure our pedagogical practices mirror the needs of the modern singer.

## **Male Motivation for Participation in Choral Ensembles**

*“But first, we must ask”* (Freer, 2006, p. 1).

Because of the choral field’s obsession with the “missing males” phenomenon, many studies have sought out the motivations or deterrents for male participation in choirs. In her 2017 dissertation, “Choir is for Girls: Intersectional Mixed Methods Perspectives on Adolescent Gender Identity, Singing Interest, and Choral Music Participation,” Nannen interviewed ninth grade boys and girls to investigate their perceptions of singing interest and choral music participation. Her results focused on the reasons that boys gave for non-participation in singing. While some males cited singing as a feminine activity and a reason for their non-participation in choir, most disregarded these stereotypical expectations. In fact, the more common reason for non-participation was a fear of failure or a belief that they did not possess the necessary level of vocal skill to be successful (p. 127).

Patrick Freer’s own experience as an adolescent singer echoes the fears of the boys in Nannen’s story and what can happen when a young boy has a negative experience with singing. Freer recounts that his elementary music teacher told him to stand in the back of the choir and mouth the words (Freer, 2006). It was not until college that he rediscovered his own singing voice. Three years later, Freer used the construct of ‘possible selves’ to inform music teachers about how both strong positive and strong negative experiences assist in the organization of thoughts and behaviors that lead toward self-definitions (Freer, 2009, p. 343). By interviewing three graduating senior high school male singers about their experiences in choir, Freer was able to ascertain emergent themes that motivated their participation in choir. For example, the singers recounted the influence other people had on their involvement in music from family members, to their

chorus teacher, to the older boys in their class. Additionally, camaraderie and memorable musical performance experiences were key themes to the positive experiences of these interviewed singers (p. 352).

The observations and conclusions drawn by Freer are echoed in the work of Andrea Ramsey in her case study of a high school men's chorus. She found that a strong motivation for male participation in choir was a sense of brotherhood.

That sense of brotherhood is a big one – saying, 'Hey we're gonna have fun and it's okay for us to joke about girls or sports, but at the end of the day we're gonna work hard and we're gonna make something really special.' That sense of 'we're gonna be open here. We're gonna be brothers here. We're gonna support each other here. If somebody's struggling with some pitches, we're all gonna support that person.' That sense of brotherhood is one that I think is so important. And safety. Comfort. You can be yourself. You're able to be free and open and respect each other (Ramsey, 2013, p. 84).

Ramsey noted three subthemes within the concept of brotherhood: support, pride and camaraderie (p. 85). The men in the choir took pride in being part of a singing brotherhood, noting especially that it was one of the places they felt most comfortable being themselves (p. 86). These same themes were echoed in Robert Faulkner's work with a male adult choir in Iceland. He observed that the men in choral rehearsal or at the pub afterwards desired to be together and even enjoyed physical contact in non-erotic ways as natural expressions of masculine affection (Faulkner, 2004). Both Ramsey and Faulkner also noted a more fluid gender expression of the male singers than one that upheld binary gendered stereotypes. Ramsey cited balance as the key component to the success of the men's chorus in her study—balance between strength and sensitivity;

balance between work and play; and balance between how much the teacher-maintained authority and how much ownership the students were allowed in rehearsal (Ramsey, 2013). It is important to note that these positive experiences by male singers occurred predominately as part of male choruses.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

#### **Design**

The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of female conductors of college men's choirs. Each case explored insight into the motivations for the conductors' work with collegiate men's choirs, observation of their rehearsal environments, and pedagogical challenges associated with women conductors working with the male voice. According to Merriam, "qualitative case study is an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a bounded phenomenon" (Merriam, 1998, p. x). Yin adds that the nature of a case study is to get a close, in-depth and first hand understanding of a particular situation (Yin, 2006). Case studies are the preferred strategy when "how" or "why" questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context (p. 1). Instrumental case studies provide insight into a particular issue, redraw generalizations, or build theory; the case study facilitates understanding of something beyond itself (Grandy, 2010). In this case, the study of women conductors of college men's choirs is instrumental in that it gives a voice to these women conductors and documents their experiences working with collegiate men's choirs for the first time.

There has been speculation about the effectiveness of women conductors of college men's choirs, but no one had studied the phenomenon. A collective case study involves the exploration of multiple instrumental cases. Through this instrumental collective case study, I explored themes that emerged from the following questions: How do women choral conductors describe their motivations for working with a college men's

choirs? How do these conductors describe the rehearsal environment in their college men's choirs? And finally, how do these conductors define the challenges of working with male singers?

### **Researcher's Lens**

My interest in this topic stemmed from a project I did for my graduate research method's class. As a public high school choir teacher, I started a men's choir in order to help grow my choral program and provide better individualized vocal support for my male students. The university that I attended for my master's degree had a history of successful gendered choirs. I felt comfortable working in that environment and believed strongly in its benefits for both male and female singers. A conversation that I had with my mentor Lori Hetzel about the lack of women conductors of all-state mixed choirs started my deeper examination into gender inequities and stereotyping in choral music. I began to notice this trend everywhere: women predominately conducting children's honor choirs, men conducting high school mixed and men's choirs, men conducting most of the college mixed choirs performing at American Choral Directors Association (ACDA) conventions. I started to research these gender issues in choral music and reflected on my own experiences with my high school men's choir. As noted in my personal statement in chapter one, conducting that high school men's choir was one of the most rewarding experiences of my career as a high school teacher. I never felt a gender divide between me and the young men in the group. I enjoyed being a part of the community and culture we built together after three years.

When I arrived at the University of Washington and found out about the men's glee club, I knew that I wanted the opportunity to work with them. In my second year I was afforded that opportunity and co-conducted the ensemble for a year. As the first

women conductor of the group, I was a little apprehensive that I would not be accepted into the club. But that quickly melted away after the first rehearsal. The year I worked with the glee club was a rewarding experience both musically and personally. It solidified my desire to empower choral conductors, especially women, to embrace opportunities to work with all types of choirs. In my experience, some women self-eliminate from positions with college men's choirs for fear that they might take away from the fraternal traditions of the group. It is my hope that the findings from this study will provide conductors and scholars greater insight and understanding into how women conductors can and do work with college men's choirs through the varied and lived experiences of the participants in this study.

### **Cases and Participants**

In order to determine how many women conductors were actively working with college men's choirs in the United States, I sent out an informal request for names through social media and online professional message boards. This search garnered twenty-two names of women known to have worked with or were currently working with college men's choirs. I examined the list of names; researched and compiled a database that included their rank, duties, length of time in their positions, size, type, and location of their universities; and made email contact with each conductor (See Appendix A). Responses from the email garnered more specific data about the conductors' careers, work with men's choirs, and interest in participating in this study. I received positive responses from eleven of the twenty-two women.

Based on the responses from the conductors, I felt that this study would not be fully realized with looking at a singular critical case. According to Yin, multiple or collective case studies allows for analysis within each setting and across settings, making

the evidence more robust and reliable (Yin, 2006). In order to provide the most robust set of data, I determined that my research should include women conductors in different stages of college teaching with a men's choir—those in the first five years of their careers, those who had between ten and fifteen years of experience, and those with more than fifteen years of experience. I felt it was important to represent a variety of university sizes and locations across the United States to encompass as many varied experiences as possible. The three conductor cases presented represent the early, middle, and mature stages of the conductors' careers and from universities in three different geographic regions of the country. Additionally, one university is a small (less than 3,000 students), liberal arts Christian college, while the other two are medium to large state supported public universities. One university is a medium sized (around 12,000 students), land grant rural campus while the other is a large (around 22,000 students), research-based urban campus. I believe saturation was reached with these three women conductors based on the differing locations and sizes of the universities, and years of experience both in the profession and as conductors of men's choirs.

**Case #1:** The selected participant, Lauren Lucas (all names are pseudonyms) is in her third year of collegiate teaching. The university where she works is a state supported research university in a large city in the southern part of the United States. Lauren serves as both a member of the choral and music education faculty. When she was hired at the university, Lauren was given the option to start a men's or a women's choir. Since she had worked successfully with high school men's choirs when she taught in Texas, Lauren decided that she did not want to pass up the opportunity to build and create a collegiate men's choirs. In just three years, Lauren's men's choir has grown from fifteen to fifty

members and is sought after across the campus and in the community to perform for numerous events and audiences. In its second year of existence, the men's choir performed at a state music conference and made its debut at Carnegie Hall in 2018. Lauren's case is notable because she has developed and implemented a deliberate and unique environment in her men's choir that has cultivated a strong sense of family and brotherhood. Her ensemble members are close-knit and invested in the mission she has set forth in the choir.

**Case #2:** The selected participant, Wendy Walters, has been in her teaching position since 1979. Wendy conducts both the men's and women's choirs and serves in an administrative position for the music department. The university where Wendy teaches is a small liberal arts religious-affiliated school in a suburban midwestern town. Although Wendy has conducted the women's choir since her arrival at the college, she did not start conducting the glee club until 2000. At the time, the glee club was conducted by a member of the voice faculty and had been struggling to regain its sense of identity after its long-time conductor retired. When the voice faculty member decided to leave the university to pursue professional singing opportunities, Wendy petitioned the Dean of the college for the opportunity to conduct the glee club. It went to the university's president for approval and was granted shortly thereafter. The glee club at this school has been an active ensemble since 1907 and has many traditions connected to its storied history. As a rule, fraternities and sororities are not permitted on the college's campus. The glee club is the closest thing the college has to a fraternity. The identity of the glee club aligns closely with other historical glee clubs across the United States. Yet it was interesting to find out that the club was founded and first conducted by a woman. Unfortunately, not much is

known about her, and she only conducted the club for two years. Before Wendy, the glee club had only three other conductors. Her tenure is now the second longest in the club's history. The glee club has thrived under Wendy's leadership, performing all over the world including a tour of China in the fall of 2017. A unique aspect of this glee club in comparison to the other two in the study is that an audition is required for admission into the ensemble. Out of the three conductors, Wendy has been in the field the longest and experienced the choral profession as a woman conductor during a time when there was even less equal representation of the sexes. She equally enjoys working with her women's choir. Because of her position, she provided the opportunity for a comparative analysis of her rehearsal environments in both the men's and women's choirs.

**Case #3:** The selected participant, Samantha Smith, is the Director of Choral Activities and conductor of the men's glee club at a medium-sized, state supported land-grant institution in the western United States. Samantha has been in her position for ten years and also teaches conducting and private voice as part of her faculty responsibilities. When she was hired, Samantha was given the opportunity to choose which ensembles she would like to conduct. She had never conducted a men's choir before and decided that it sounded like a good challenge and opportunity. While she did not start the men's choir at this university, it had only been in existence for about three years before she took over as conductor. Under her leadership, the men's choir has performed at regional and state conferences and toured all over the region. It is a well-recognized and sought after performing ensemble both on campus and in the community. Samantha has created a strong community and brotherhood that emphasizes student leadership and mentorship amongst the singers within this ensemble. Since Samantha also conducts the auditioned

mixed choir, my opportunity to observe the two rehearsal environments added to the richness of the data collected. A hallmark of this group is the varied levels of the singers, from first-time choir members to vocal performance and music education students.

Samantha has embraced the role as conductor of the men's choir. She has a true passion for men's choral music as well as promoting women to feel empowered to lead all-male ensembles as successfully as a male conductor. In her words, "good teaching is good teaching; good singing is good singing" (personal communication, September 5, 2017).

### **Procedures**

All procedures were carried out in accordance with the guidelines of and with the approval of the institutional review board at the University of Washington. After establishing written consent of their willingness to participate in this study from the three conductors, I set up week-long residencies with each conductor at her university. My goal was to spend a week with each conductor at the beginning of her school year to observe how she established the community and culture of her men's choirs. Additionally, I asked each conductor to identify three members of her ensemble that represented a new member in the group, a music major, a non-music major, and a long-time member in a leadership position. Interviews with the singers took place away from the music building at their convenience throughout the week. Interviews were set up with each conductor during the week-long visit along with videotaped observations of her rehearsals. In addition to the formal interview, numerous opportunities arose during the residency for informal conversations and observations of each conductor's daily schedule and duties.

## **Data Collection**

In order to ensure a thorough representation of the case, data were collected in multiple ways. The first was through direct observations of each conductor during her rehearsals and other teaching activities throughout the week. Video recording of the choral rehearsals was used to allow for more in-depth analysis of the data after the fact. Semi-structured and open-ended interview protocols were used to allow for standardization of data and the flexibility for new data to emerge from informal conversations. See Appendix D for the semi-structured protocol used for the conductor interviews and Appendix E for the semi-structured protocol used with the singers. In order to provide comfort and ease for the participants in the case during the interviews, students were met at a location of their choice, anywhere on or off campus, and at a time convenient to their schedules to allow for maximum flexibility. The conductors were also interviewed in uninterrupted two-hour blocks of time in a location of their choosing to allow for their maximum comfort. Before any interview commenced, each participant received a consent form (see Appendix B for conductors and Appendix C for singers). The purpose of the study was outlined for each participant, and they were allowed to ask questions in order to abide by the ethical principle of beneficence (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Each interview was transcribed diligently with the intent to represent each participant as clearly and authentically as possible. Along with transcriptions of each interview, researcher's field notes and reflective journaling were crucial to the triangulation of the data used to identify emergent themes.

## **Data Analysis**

The data in this study were analyzed using the constant comparative method, by which data are “compared with another to determine similarities and differences” (Merriam, 1998, p. 30). Copies of the interview transcripts were sent to the conductors in order to establish credibility and validate the research (Stake, 2010). Additionally, all participants were given the opportunity to request that an alias be used to maintain their confidentiality. While all three conductors waived their right for confidentiality, the identities of the participants have been masked for the purposes of this paper and to protect the identities of the students interviewed.

Audio transcriptions of interviews with all the conductors and singers were coded. I used “in vivo” coding for the first cycle of data coding. In vivo is defined as “in that which is alive,” and, as a code, “refers to a word or short phrase from the actual language found in the qualitative data record” (Saldaña, 2016, p. 106). I wanted to use coding techniques that would best prioritize and honor the participant’s voice (p. 106). In order to better organize the array of in vivo codes collected, I cut and pasted them into a separate document. From this document I utilized “pattern coding” for my second cycle of codes. Pattern coding provides a way of grouping segments of data into a smaller number of categories, themes, or concepts (p. 236). Using these two cycles, the words of the participants were grouped into pattern codes and, ultimately, themes.

## **Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness in qualitative research consists of the following components: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Devault, 2017). In order to demonstrate the trustworthiness of my research, every effort was made to document the

processes and procedures employed for this project. Additionally, member checks were utilized with the interview transcriptions to ensure validity and credibility of the data collected. Along with member checks, data in the study were also triangulated. Triangulation ensures thick description and increases the trustworthiness of research findings (Grandy, 2010). It can make the researcher more confident in their findings (Stake, 2010). By analyzing and crosschecking my data across a variety of sources—including but not limited to video recordings, interview transcripts, field notes, reflective journal entries, and first-hand observations—I worked to construct the validity for this case (Yin, 1994). As a novice researcher, it was important to me to have a more experienced researcher review and examine my data findings. This peer review helped to strengthen the findings of the study and validated the emergent themes.

### **Limitations**

In order to maximize validity and reliability in the study, it is imperative to keep the researcher's own bias and prejudice separate from the data collected. As a former conductor of a collegiate men's choir, I acknowledge the possibility of my previous experiences casting unconscious influence on my interpretation of the data. It was my goal to remain as unbiased as possible, and I made a conscious effort to be a silent observer during my residencies at each school. It is also possible that my gender as a female researcher could have limited some of the data collected. It is my opinion that the singers and conductors were honest and authentic in their interviews with me, but it must be acknowledged that answers to some questions might have changed had my gender been male.

Another limitation to the case study was the duration of one-week residencies at each location. While I was able to observe multiple rehearsals and other events such as informal meetings and social gatherings during these residencies, it is challenging to document a whole culture in such a short period of time. A longer observation would have been ideal and should potentially be considered for future research. In order to make up for this shortcoming, I have remained in contact with all three conductors and followed the successes of their ensembles through online social media platforms, email, and phone correspondence throughout the year.

### **Significance of the Study**

As shown in the literature review, the wealth of writings on gender roles and stereotypes in choral music focus primarily on the following areas: the underlying blame placed on female elementary and secondary teachers for the lack of male singers in choir and the gender imbalance of women collegiate directors due in part to the preponderance of men in influential hiring positions. In his 2016 dissertation entitled “Shared Insights: A Survey of Postsecondary and Adult Men’s Chorus Directors,” Gregory Graf sought to add to the body of existing literature available on conductors of men’s choirs through interviews with current conductors in the field. An unintentional byproduct of those interviews, however, was the discovery of deep-rooted biases and outright discriminatory views held by some notable men’s choir conductors.

The questions and answers provided by the conductors in Graf’s study became the inspiration for many of the areas focused on in this dissertation. One of the questions asked of the surveyed participants was to describe the appeal of singing in a TTBB ensemble. Four major themes emerged: camaraderie, vocal sonority, unique repertoire,

and vocal pedagogy (Graf, 2016). The camaraderie experienced in men's choirs was heralded by many of the conductors and connected specifically to the gendered exclusivity of the ensemble.

[T]he all-male chorus offers a bonding experience for men that is crucial and often lacking in society. If a man is not into sports, there are few opportunities for him to interact in a setting just for men. Choruses allow men to connect on an emotional level, and they do not need to worry about the presence of women in an all-male ensemble... [T]here are experiences unique to each gender and I have observed that many men feel able to show a side of themselves when interacting with other guys. Participation in a male chorus can offer a freedom for men to be fully who they are and express freely that individuality without any reservation (p.13-14).

The following quotes from Graf's interviews comment directly on the gender of the conductor and its importance in creating and maintain that sense of camaraderie in men's choirs.

Not only is there a unique bond among singers but there is also a special connection between a male conductor and a men's chorus.... [F]rom a leadership perspective, it is incredibly rewarding to help shape young men into being good men, and inspiring to me to see how many good men are out there. I feel the same type of reward in a mixed [choir] setting, but I can't offer some of the common experience, nor speak to some of the common challenges of young women. There are some points of the human experience that are simply gender specific" (p. 14).

The most telling quotes in the survey came from participants theorizing about the low percentage of women conductors working with collegiate and community men's choirs. Eight participants blamed sexism in the conducting profession and society as a whole for the lack of women. Four others attributed it to women's lack of interest in men's

choruses. Women's lack of vocal connection with the male singer was another reason cited, with one male respondent mentioning that, "it may be intimidating to try and build an ensemble when you can't model the vocal technique" (p. 26). The final reason given for the smaller proportion of women conducting men's choirs related to the social connection with the ensemble members. In the words of this respondent, "my best guess is that men feel more comfortable and behave differently around a woman versus a man conductor.... [B]eing a woman in a room full of men may make some female conductors uneasy" (p. 26). I find this final quote by one of Graf's respondent's to be the most troubling.

I think most men do not imagine themselves connecting in the same vulnerable way to a female conductor that they are able to connect to a male conductor. I also think the environment that men's choirs usually create may in some ways be a bit unfamiliar to many women; therefore creating/fostering this environment may be difficult for some women" (p. 28).

At least two women conductors were interviewed as part of the survey and allowed to add their voice and perspective to the results. Dr. Nicole Lamartine's answers about the community and accepting nature of her singers seemed to come in direct conflict with the quotes from other conductors. She stated, "Wyoming is a conservative, rancher, farmer, individually-minded state. It's a profound thing in this area I think to be a woman and conduct a men's chorus. I am proud of the guys for being open-minded and accepting me" (p. 31).

The significance of my study is rooted in the examination of the choral profession's strongly held beliefs surrounding gender roles and identity, leadership, vocal

pedagogy, and community. Graf's survey had men speculating on why more women are not conducting men's choirs and proposing that men may not feel as comfortable with a woman leading them. To date, no one has studied postsecondary male ensembles that have women conductors. This present study gives voice to those women conductors currently working in the field and to their singers, documenting their experiences and examining the themes connected to their stories. Like all qualitative studies, the results of this study cannot be generalized. However, the results may be helpful to other choral professionals wishing to gain a better understanding of women conductors of college men's choirs (Cresswell, 2007).

## CHAPTER 4

### CASE STUDY FINDINGS

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of female conductors of college men's choirs. This research was guided by the following questions: How do women choral conductors describe their motivations for working with college men's choirs? How do these conductors describe the rehearsal environment in their college men's choir? How do these conductors define the challenges of working with male singers? The following areas provided focus from the themes that emerged from the conductor interviews: motivation, rehearsal environment, and challenges associated with conducting a men's choirs. These areas were also explored in the student interviews and used to provide additional context and perspective to each conductor's case.

#### **Motivation**

#### **Trailblazers**

The three conductors studied had different backgrounds and paths that led them to conducting collegiate men's choirs. Trailblazing was the overall theme for the conductors' motivations for working with college men's choirs. A trailblazer is a person who makes a new track through wild country; a pioneer; an innovator. The three subthemes under the overall theme of trailblazer include (a) challenge and opportunity (b) passion, and (c) authenticity. While each conductor would probably not consider herself to be a trailblazer, each chose to forge a new path where none had existed before. Lauren Lucas chose to start a college men's choir when given the opportunity to pick between a men's or women's choir. Wendy Walters sought out the opportunity to bring back the

prestige and quality of the historic glee club despite challenging the traditional gender roles valued by her university. Samantha Smith chose to conduct the men's choir over other more traditional ensemble choices because it was something new and "sounded fun" (personal communication, September 5, 2017). All three women embraced the idea of tackling something different and challenging and, subsequently, found a passion for men's choirs and the communities these choirs built.

### *Challenge and Opportunity*

Each conductor had unique circumstances that allowed for the opportunity to conduct the men's choirs at their universities. When Lauren was hired, she was charged with helping to add more singers to the choral program through the establishment of a men's and women's choir. When I asked her why she chose to start with a men's choir, Lauren said,

Selfishly, I have always really been interested in men's choruses. I had a lot of successes with men's choruses from middle school, all men's choruses through high school and I had never really had the opportunity to do collegiate...and that's really the field that I kind of wanted to make my niche in, was this men's chorus, this whole like women can't teach men...and so I just wanted to start to break that seal open a little bit and I said, well maybe I can do that (personal correspondence, August 23, 2017).

By comparison, Wendy started conducting the men's glee club after she was a well-established and respected member of the faculty. As a professor at a small Christian liberal arts college, Wendy takes her role as a mentor to "inspire young women" seriously, especially in showing them that it is possible to have a successful career and

family life if they so choose (personal communication, August 29, 2017). When I asked her about her motivations for seeking out the position with the men's glee club, she stated, "I came here in 1979 and in 2001 I started conducting the men's glee club and I look at that as part of the mission of saying that women can do this" (personal communication, August 29, 2017). Wendy had previously filled in for a sabbatical leave with the glee club and admitted that it was a tough experience. But nevertheless, she persisted. When her colleague announced he would be pursuing a professional singing career and leaving the glee club, she went to the Dean and told him that she would like the opportunity to conduct the group. As she explains,

I will say my colleague who gave it up did a fabulous job of passing the baton. I can remember the meeting, he went in front of the guys and said you're gonna have the best experience with Dr. Walters. And then some of the guys who I had had a couple of years before actually apologized to me for the way they had treated me, and I think once we started singing and they knew that I could take them to another level, they recognized where we were going (personal correspondence, August 29, 2017).

Wendy made the difficult decision to seek out a role as conductor of a men's glee club at a university that emphasized traditional gender roles. As a long-time faculty member at the university and a graduate of the school, she shares many of the traditional values that would potentially prevent a woman from inserting herself into a traditional male role. Yet, Wendy knew she could make a difference with the men's glee club and increase the quality and sense of community for the male students. She earned their trust and loyalty because they were "feeling pretty good about how they were sounding" (personal correspondence, August 29, 2017).

Samantha Smith's position at her university afforded her access to opportunities like conducting the men's choir because she was already in a top leadership position as the director of choral activities. When she was hired, Samantha was the only choral person on the faculty. She explains,

They were going to hire an adjunct to take over the choirs I couldn't have in my load, so the department head at the time said, of course we want you to conduct the collegiate chorale because it's the top mixed ensemble. It has the highest profile. And then you can choose whatever else you want to conduct. I thought, I've never done a men's choir, so that sounds fun. I'll do that. And it scared me, and I was like, ok, sounds good (personal communication, September 5, 2017).

Each of these women embraced the potential challenge that came with conducting a men's choir and jumped at the opportunity, making them trailblazers.

### **Passion**

All three conductors showed an immense passion for their profession. This passion was evident through their responses to the interview questions and in my observations of their rehearsals. Passion goes hand in hand as a subtheme of trailblazing. When you are blazing your own path, role models are harder to come by; an internal drive must exist. Lauren's passion for working with men's choirs manifested through her desire to build community and a place for all to belong. The men's glee that Lauren founded is the only non-auditioned choir in the music department. Her mission is to welcome anyone that identifies with the tenor and bass voice parts. She states, "You walk in that door and you sing. You don't have to go through a huge process. You don't have to be intimidated, let music feed your soul, essentially" (personal correspondence, August

23, 2017). When students walk into her classroom, she greets each one at the door, usually by name, unless they are new and engages them in conversation. The environment feels relaxed and inviting, even as I observed their first rehearsals of the year. New students were immediately shepherded into the rehearsal room either by other members of the ensemble or by Lauren herself.

Community and brotherhood were the major themes that permeated Andrea Ramsey's study of a high school men's choir (Ramsey, 2013). She found that "the men view their choir mates as brothers and take pride in being part of a singing brotherhood. They speak of the brotherhood as comfortable, supportive, fun, and acknowledge the great music they are making as well as the bonds and connections they feel with one another" (p. 86). Lauren shared this same passion and desire for the members of her ensemble.

My goal is to make a family. It's a family; it's a brotherhood. There's something we put on the program notes: we are a community, we are a brotherhood, we are musicians, we are humans, we are gentlemen, we are brothers, we are sons, we are friends, we are motivators, we are [name of the ensemble] .... That's all of what they encompass. You know some of that is brawny and burly and inappropriate, and some of it is raw, emotional crying in rehearsal...and it doesn't matter if you're male or female, you're human: a heart is a heart and everybody, everybody bleeds. And I want them to know that it's ok to be that way in there and that it's a family...so I want them to have a place to escape, to have support, just a functional family within the midst of this because they don't have that. They're gone from their parents and they need that. They need somebody to have as a stable and a constant (personal communication, August 23, 2017).

While Lauren's passion is evident in her desire to build community and camaraderie in her men's choir, Wendy's passion is better observed in her rehearsals and through the words of the members of her ensemble. Because the college she works at is a Christian university, each choral ensemble holds a weekly devotional as part of their rehearsal. Wendy led the devotional the week I was there observing. During this devotional, there was a palpable sense of her passion for faith, the men in her ensemble, and the music they share. The president of the ensemble told me that "she really makes us look at the text.... She makes sure we know what we're singing before we ever even get into the music.... The fact that we're at a Christian school and we're singing these sacred songs and can mean it" (personal communication, August 29, 2017). In an article written for the college paper, Wendy wrote of this passion for her students:

I have come to realize that part of my calling to teach is to try to live as a woman devoted to serving Christ through her profession, her marriage, and her family. Another part of my role as a professor is to help my students recognize and develop their gifts....It should be clear to our students that we care about them, as we push them to achieve the most they can during their years in college. Ultimately the measure of our success as educators and as mentors is the degree to which they learn to serve the Lord with their whole being in the exercise of their talents and skills, as well as in their attention to their roles as men and women.

The passion that Wendy has for teaching her men's choir is based in her strong faith and mission to teach all her students. Like Lauren, she is passionate about having a strong community in her ensembles. In her own words, "we have a built-in community builder in all being faith based" (personal correspondence, August 29, 2017).

The passion exhibited by Samantha Smith shown through in her interview with me. She would light up every time she spoke about her men's choir. When I asked her about her own career goals and aspirations, she told me,

So, I think of men's choir as the highlight of my week, my three hours where we just have joy. Whether it's in music making or joking around or just being goofy, I love those three hours a week and I love the fact that we're able to bring something to the greater population of maybe non-singers who are a part of who we are. I love that. And I love teaching men's choir, maybe more than the mixed choir. And I don't know exactly what it is about that. So yeah, I am completely passionate about it. And as far as the future, I always want it to be part of my future. Always, always (personal communication, August 23, 2017).

These three conductors are not just passionate about their men's choirs, but also about their roles as teachers and mentors. This was evident throughout the weeks of observations of their rehearsals and interactions with their students.

### **Authenticity**

In Graf's survey of postsecondary and adult men's chorus directors, one of the male conductors stated that "female conductors of men's choirs that he has observed tend to be 'larger-than-life' people with exceptionally strong personalities" (Graf, 2016, p. 28). While stereotypes are formed based on some truth, I found that while each conductor was successful with her men's choir, each had her own individual style. In fact, with both Wendy and Samantha, I had the unique opportunity to observe their work in front of two different types of ensembles—Wendy conducting the men's and the women's choir, and Samantha conducting the men's choir and mixed ensemble. In both cases, there was very little change in their demeanor and delivery of material between the two ensembles.

Wendy's style is matter of fact, quick witted, and focused on delivering sound vocal pedagogy to her choirs. She allows little time in either rehearsal for down-time to talk or socialize. This held true with both the men and women's ensembles. She writes a lesson plan on the board in the front of the room for both groups and follows the same format for each rehearsal – vocalization for about 10 minutes followed by targeted work on three to five pieces of music. There is a bit more club business in the men's rehearsal that stems from some of the glee club's traditions, but the meat of the musical objectives remains constant between the two ensembles. Wendy describes this in her own words, "I'm there to build the voice and to teach them...there are some funny things we do [in the men's rehearsal] but for the most part it's pretty much the same" (personal communication, August 29, 2017).

The same is true for Samantha's choirs. Samantha's pedagogy is rooted in her experiences with Laban based movement training. Additionally, her background as a trained classical singer with a master's degree in vocal performance informs her approach to choral conducting. She told me

Movement has always been really important to me and important to my music making. And I did some intensive training for Laban movement theory that changed the way I was as a conductor. And as soon as I brought a more engaged, more physically involved way of making music, I felt a deeper connection with them [the singers] (personal communication, September 5, 2017).

One aspect of Samantha's physicality that positions her to connect easily with her male students is that she is a world-class powerlifter. All of the members of her ensemble interviewed referred to her physical prowess and the tradition of Samantha bench-

pressing the smallest freshman singer at the fall retreat. I asked her to tell the story of this event.

It started this way, a long time ago, I started cross fit and I was amazed at how it made me feel and how good I felt and how energized I felt all the time. And cross fit is all about doing as much as you can in a very short time. I remember starting to incorporate that into my rehearsals.... Then on Fridays we started to do “feats of strength.” Every Friday, each section would nominate one guy to participate in feats of strength and they would compete against me. Whoever won the challenge that week got a point. And so, by the end of the semester, we added up the points and the section that won, I would take them out for wings at Applebee’s. Well, I won so we all went out for wings. But what I realized in that semester is that they looked forward to that so much. But then I don’t know, we stopped doing it because I noticed there were some guys that were decidedly not physical and were not participating, and I didn’t want to exclude them. So, we stopped. Then I started powerlifting, and at our retreat they found out that I was powerlifting, and some guy said, you should bench-press John! And they were all chanting, right, so what do you do? So, I bench-pressed John and it was like the hook, they loved it (personal communication, September 5, 2017)

While Samantha’s physicality gave her a way to connect with her male students, it was interesting that she observed not all of her students wanted to participate in strength challenges. The adage “you can’t judge a book by its cover” worked both ways in this instance; Samantha could not judge that all her male students would be interested in feats of strength and her students could not judge that she would be a great powerlifter, especially considering that she is less than five feet tall. The gendered stereotypes held by both Samantha and her students are challenged in this vignette. It seemed that initially

Samantha looked to relate to the men in her ensemble through a perceived value that her singers would have on competition and athletic prowess. This was based on prior success with similar activities and probably her own unconscious bias about what young men would find appealing. However, as she became more aware of the unique values and interests of all the members in her ensemble, Samantha's viewpoint expanded and changed. This change in understanding has fostered a deeper connection between the members of the ensemble and Samantha because she has found ways to connect each individual singer.

The opportunity to observe Samantha in two types of ensemble settings was useful in determining if she changed her demeanor or emphasized her masculinity in front of the male ensemble. The main difference I observed between the men's choir and auditioned ensemble's rehearsals was the expectation for professionalism due to the auditioned nature of the mixed choir. The men's choir is non-auditioned and therefore focuses more on vocal development skills, especially for the novice singers. While Samantha's demeanor did not noticeably change, she admitted that in her experience men and women process information differently and therefore she is required to adjust how she presents material and information.

For the men, I have to go like bullet points, or 'chunklets,' just 'bink bink bink.' They can only take in so much at a time. For example, oftentimes in my collegiate chorale we will progress from big picture, into smaller sections. The guys they don't like it, it's like they can't interpret the whole big picture first, it's like they have to go one kernel at a time. But women want the big picture. And the men go along with that in the mixed choir because the women are always more advanced than they are (personal communication, September 5, 2017).

Validating this point made by Samantha is beyond the scope of this study, but it was interesting to note that she was the only conductor to recognize that information delivery could be perceived differently and that its cause was potentially related to gender.

Not only do women conductors have to confront questions relating to their personality and demeanor remaining authentic, but they also have to navigate issues surrounding professional dress and appearance. In Anna Edward's dissertation, "Gender and the Conductor," she demonstrates that concern over what to wear for women conductors can be a daunting task. In her words, "women have had to concern themselves with deciding what to wear to avoid potential judgments such as too alluring, too feminine, or too masculine" (Edwards, 2015, p. 70). In each interview, we discussed the stereotypes that women have to navigate as conductors with regard to their dress and demeanor. Lauren stated,

I think to be successful you must be genuine... You need to be genuine with who you are....I do not own a single skirt...I've never conducted in a skirt...I have a little bit of a badass edge, so I needed something. I think that every conductor has to have something that's theirs. I mean we can name all these female prominent conductors, and I can tell you what their look is on that podium...so I wear bright red high heels on stage (personal communication, August 23, 2017).

As a person who claims to dress in an androgynous fashion, it was interesting to learn that her trademark was red high heels. Lauren went on to explain it was a way for her to connect with the men without wearing a suit,

I'm part of their family; it's a partnership. I don't have a choir without them, and they don't have a choir without me. If I separate myself too much as the conductor, that family doesn't work. And so, I think that you

need to stay true to who you are as well as what your look is and what your feel is, but also define what you want to be perceived on stage. I mean everybody knows I have my badass red high heels (personal communication, August 23, 2017).

Wendy also spends time thinking about her look and how she can connect with her men's choir through dress and appearance while also staying true to herself. She explains,

I still wear my pearls when I'm on stage with the guys. I mean, I don't wear a tuxedo. I wear pants most of the time, but I wear pants with the girls most of the time. When the boys change, they have two outfits, they have their tuxedos and then they have a blazer outfit with a patch and a tie that they all wear. And I do have a suit that has pants and a skirt, and I usually vary it for what we're doing. But I have started wearing a tie with that...so I can't tie the tie, my husband has to tie it for me (personal communication, August 29, 2017).

Samantha shared with me an exchange that she had with a fellow female colleague about dress and appearance and how that can gain you trust within a men's ensemble.

When I first knew that I was conducting the men's choir, I was talking with a female colleague, and I said I am a little nervous about this and she told me, all you have to do is wear short skirts and high heels and they'll love you and I didn't know what to say! I was kind of offended, but I understood why she said that. And I was like no, that's totally wrong. Yes, I wear skirts and heels but not for the reason to win their affection...I try to look feminine when I conduct, but I do wear pants when I conduct, because that's a choice that I make...because I do feel more comfortable in that music, not in a skirt (personal communication, September 5, 2017).

While these conductors had to contend with issues of dress and appearance, each woman found ways to represent herself in an authentic way that did not necessarily conform to gender norms. One of Wendy's students commented positively about her attire saying, "she dresses up in the suits when we go places and she wears the blazer and the tie...she makes a very good point of building rapport with us" (personal communication, August 29, 2017). This observation points to the importance the singers placed on feeling connected to their conductor. Wendy was able to achieve that connection with her singers by simply putting on their same tie and jacket.

The motivations for each conductor to work with a college men's choir were explored through the themes of challenge and opportunity, passion, and authenticity. Each conductor's journey was different, but each shared some commonalities such as seizing opportunities and being unafraid to work in an unknown environment while maintaining a strong commitment to personal values and beliefs.

### **Rehearsal Environment**

The three themes that emerged from an examination of each choirs' rehearsal environment were: community, novice singers, and empowering student leadership. Within the larger theme of community, subthemes of family, traditions, and acceptance permeated the language used by both the conductors and students. In this section, the words of the students will be used extensively to add richness to the conductor's experiences of their rehearsal environment.

## **Community**

*“Participation in a male chorus can offer a freedom for men to be fully who they are and express freely that individuality without any reservation”* (Graf, 2016, pg. 14).

An examination of the literature on the attraction of the all-male choral experience to male singers highlights the unique community of brotherhood and common identity that is found within these ensembles (Graf, 2016; Ramsey, 2013; Freer, 2009, 2012). The community built by each woman conductor in this study shared many of the traditional traits of a collegiate men’s choir. Examining each of the communities created by these women conductors offers a rare opportunity to be in the room where it happened. The subthemes of family, traditions, and acceptance point to the importance placed on shared identity by both the conductors and members of the ensemble.

## *Family*

Lauren’s university has a world-renowned choral program with high standards for acceptance into the choral ensembles. In some of our informal conversations, she relayed the feelings of anxiety that she witnesses each year when the audition examples for the choirs are released. I happened to be on campus during the first round of auditions and witnessed an impromptu “cram session” led by some of the choral graduate students. Pressure is placed on the vocal students to achieve perfection and acceptance into the top mixed ensemble. Lauren’s men’s choir provides a completely different ensemble experience. In her words, “there’s a place for everybody to sing” (personal communication, August 23, 2017). The history of men’s choirs in the United States shows that most started as extracurricular groups. Lauren’s ensemble is both curricular and extra-curricular. It is not required for music majors, which can make recruiting some

of them more challenging. She has to be very flexible with her schedule and expectations for rehearsals. In fact, in order to attract some of the instrumental music majors, she holds extra rehearsal sections just for them outside of her weekly rehearsals so that they can participate. In short, Lauren's mission is "to be as open as possible. And still make fabulous music with wonderful musicians" (personal communication, August 23, 2017).

The interviews with Lauren's students echoed her definitions of community in the ensemble. One student commented, "it's just really fun, and I've learned that it's an extremely big family, a very dysfunctional family, but it's a family" (personal communication, August 24, 2017). I asked this student to describe the rehearsal environment in his own words, and he told me about "the circle. We always rehearsal in a circle unless we're setting up for an actual concert...but usually it'll be in a circle, so she can hear in a more intimate setting" (personal communication, August 25, 2017). I was able to observe the first rehearsal of the semester with Lauren and her ensemble, and I saw the effect the circle had on building the community in the ensemble. I have seen many choirs rehearse in a circle with the conductor floating somewhere in the middle of the circle, disconnected from the ensemble and leading. But Lauren puts herself as part of the circle. The piano was even part of the circle. The effect is subtle, but the results ensure that no one is left out and all members, including the director, are connected.

The first rehearsal ended with the guys singing the piece, *Sing Your Way Home* by Joseph Martin. She did not rehearse the piece and some of the guys did not have music for it. One of the singers described the experience best,

for me that moment that it clicked this is something special and we deserve to be heard, was when we ended rehearsal with *Sing Your Way Home*. Without any practice, I mean, of course I was looking at the music,

but without any practice, you can like tell that it was heart and soul only. And that's something, and she causes that, she always explains it to us, and just reminds us that no matter what is in your day, you can just lay everything down for an hour and fifteen minutes and be with your brothers. And one sister (personal communication, August 24, 2017).

One of the singers that I interviewed had never participated in a choir before his enrollment in Lauren's choir. He mentioned this same moment as the "hook" for him, when he felt accepted as part of the community. He told me, "I never sung but I could do something and by the end, it was all around me like this melody. We had created. It was very beautiful. I had never been involved in something like that. So yeah, that was a big moment for me" (personal communication, August 24, 2017). I asked this student, a non-music major, to tell me about the environment in a regular rehearsal, especially since he had no other choral experiences for comparison. He stated that

the environment is very friendly. The group is really a very large group of friends. I've even heard that it's virtually drama free compared to the others. I've never experienced any negative feelings from anyone. It does feel very close. Actually, one of the guys I met in choir last year, he's my roommate now. He's one of my better friends here at college. I was very glad to meet him, um, yeah very friendly, very brotherly, I suppose (personal communication, August 24, 2017).

Because Lauren's group has only existed for three years, I was able to interview a member who had been with the ensemble from its inception. In fact, he was the charter president and helped write the bylaws. He has participated in numerous choral and instrumental ensembles and even sang with another collegiate men's choir directed by a

male conductor. I asked him to describe the differences that he has observed between other ensembles rehearsals and the environment of the men's choir. He replied,

In every other experience that I have had in choirs it is usually a bit more clinical and a bit more subdued, and no one's really having that much fun. It's all about making sure we all make this pristine image of what the music's supposed to be, and I don't really enjoy that very much. In our ensemble, I feel like everyone enjoys rehearsal so much that all of us, we are very happy, very jovial, and it can sometimes seem like a bag of crazy, but we get a lot of work done. And I notice that usually the music comes together a lot better. Our musicianship as in, like, the step beyond making it a beautiful piece of art, but then a step beyond that makes people actually have an emotional connection to our music. Because Dr. Lucas is that kind of person. And it's contagious (personal communication, August 25, 2017).

Because this student had experienced men's choir with both a male conductor and female conductor, I asked him if he observed any differences between the two groups. He stated that

the major difference is the age of the program. The other ensemble is this established group of gentlemen: lots of leaders, lots of people who have been there forever. But the major difference is that, and we have put a lot of work into really vamping up the culture here, so I don't see too many differences now (personal communication, August 25, 2017).

### *Traditions*

In contrast to the relatively new community that Lauren created in her men's choir, Wendy's glee club has existed since 1907 and came to her with community traditions and rituals. Her case provided a chance for me to observe the dynamics of a

woman conducting a glee club that has held onto many vestiges of its history and celebrates them as part of their current culture. When Wendy took over conducting the ensemble, she made a point to keep a lot of the traditions alive. For example, during one of the more storied eras of the glee club, each concert would end with

an old musty arrangement of *A Mighty Fortress* and the “old men” or alumni of the ensemble would come up and sing with the group. Another conductor started the tradition of singing Paul Mons *E’en so Lord Jesus Quickly Come*. Well, now we do both of them (personal communication, August 29, 2017).

Wendy understood the importance of the community of “old men,” and their connection to the current ensemble ensured continued support of the glee club in the future.

The rehearsal environment is full of these traditions, but none of the current members know the stories behind their origins. Even Wendy did not know the origins of some of the traditions, except that they had always been a part of the culture of the club. The students I interviewed included a non-music major, a music major, and the president of the club. Each described the welcoming nature of the ensemble despite the members’ lack of explanation to the new members regarding their traditions or rituals.

You feel kind of on the outside cause there’s all these friends, but they make an effort to bring you in, especially through the “new man party.” But you feed off each other and the energy is very fun. And you’re not trying to impress anybody. It’s just communal, the brotherhood kind of thing (personal communication, August 30, 2017).

Wendy described another one of the traditions that they do on the first rehearsal.

We put in a piece that we sang last year and then we make all the new men stand up and sing and try to sight-read it, and they fall apart and then they sit down, and the old men stand up and we say, ah, let's see how the old men do on it. Let's just compare. And they just wiz through it. If we do a Russian piece, we'll always pull that out and that's always, that's kind of fun for them (personal communication, August 30, 2017).

Because I visited Wendy's college during the first week of school, I got to witness this tradition and a few others. For example, if someone grabs the wrong number folder, they have to announce it in rehearsal and all the gentlemen yell "shambles!" in unison. Another tradition states that whenever someone has to make an announcement in the rehearsal, which happens fairly often, the speaker stands up and says, "Gentlemen?" and all the members of the ensemble answer "YESSS?????" in unison. The club also has a patron saint, Buxtehude. Wendy does not think it has anything to do with the musician himself or know why he became the patron saint. Nevertheless, every Thursday after rehearsal all the members go to eat dinner together, which they call "Buxtefooda." When they play intramural basketball, it is called "Buxtehoopa." Every year at their Christmas party, a white elephant gift exchange takes place. Wendy's husband has contributed many items that have become sought after gifts, including "a picture where he photo shopped this picture of Buxtehude and it's supposedly of his wife with my [Wendy's] face on it" (personal communication, August 29, 2017). All of these traditions and rituals contribute to the community of this ensemble. While they can make the ensemble feel a bit more like a fraternity than a choir, one of the students interviewed shared what seems to be the core mission of the ensemble: "It's a great place to grow in relationship with each other and with God" (personal communication, August 30, 2017).

While the rehearsal environment in Samantha's men's choir shared many commonalities with Lauren's group, it is important to note that I did not find a formula that each ensemble seemed to follow. One of the first things I noticed upon entering the rehearsal room during men's choir rehearsal was a large banner announcing the name of the group hanging from the front white board. The same rehearsal space is used for all of the choral ensembles at Samantha's university. I was able to observe rehearsals for the mixed choir and the women's choir conducted by another faculty member, and neither of them had banners hung up during rehearsal. I noticed that Samantha made it a point to greet all of her singers at the door when they first walked in. It was organized chaos as old members greeted friends, new members shyly introduced themselves, and everyone gathered music and determined where they would sit. Routine and physicality are hallmarks of her opening warm-ups with the men; everything has a purpose and a rhyme.

Community is something of great value to Samantha in both her men's and mixed choirs. I asked her to describe the differences in the communities between the two choirs. She explained,

with collegiate chorale, we definitely have a sense of community. We have a sense of purpose. We have a bond. We have a sense of being that is, I don't know how to describe it, it's just different. When I think about the men's choir, I always smile. They're amusing. They're accepting. They're just this ragtag bunch of guys, right? And they come together and create this amazing, spectacular thing...Not only does it bring people together, it teaches people how to be better humans, learn about culture, all these different things (personal communication, September 6, 2017).

Samantha's students, many of them first-time choral singers, emphasized this tight-knit community in their ensemble. Said one, "There's no judging or anything of that nature.

It's, you know, a safe place but at the same time, we're very dedicated to getting the work done and making sure we're prepared. And I think it's a good balance of the two" (personal communication, September 7, 2017). I asked one of the students to describe a rehearsal in the men's choir. As an instrumental music education student with experience in marching band and orchestra, he was able to articulate some differences between the senses of community.

In marching band, we have an entire week where it's just us working together. And we form that camaraderie really easily, like we have to form that camaraderie, whereas in other settings such as orchestra, you don't get as much camaraderie because the strings and the winds and the percussion almost never are seeing each other than those two times a week. And in men's choir, it definitely feels like you are all together and all are one big family in a sense...you get to know everyone on a personal level (personal communication, September 7, 2017).

Another instrumental music education student interviewed expressed this personal connection to the members of the men's choir. He told me, "I have four older sisters, so I never really had like a brother, and the men's choir is kind of more like a brotherhood, a place just to be myself and hang around with other people...yet I think there's a definite drive to be better, be more musical, but also a fun environment" (personal communication, September 6, 2017).

### *Safe Place*

The community of a men's choir is often connected to the single-gendered environment. As choral professionals work to provide safe places for all their singers, the question of how to support students who are transgendered or whose identities are better defined outside of the gender binary needs to be addressed. Samantha and I discussed her thoughts on the inclusionary environment in gendered choirs. She explained,

My instinct is to say that gendered ensembles give such a deep sense of safety and identity to the choral music making, not identity in terms of sex or gender but in terms of that sense of community. It's the way we process information and the way we interact with people, as genders, I think. And so, as genders then we create this community, and so yes, I might teach a men's choir, but I might have transgender students in there and that's great because they identify in the same community, and so I think I have an opportunity to create a safe community for all of these people who identify in that community (personal communication, September 5, 2017).

In response to the desire for more inclusivity of any students' gender expression, many gendered choirs are changing from their traditional gendered names to more gender-neutral titles. For example, at the University of Washington this past year, the Women's Choir was renamed the Treble Choir and the Men's Glee Club dropped the "men's" in front of their name and is now titled the UW Glee Club. As previously stated in this paper, even the historic Harvard Glee Club has re-designated its identity from a men's choir to a TTBB ensemble (Graf, 2016).

While Samantha does not currently have any transgendered singers in her ensemble that she is aware of, Lauren does. She is purposeful in creating her community to encompassing all expressions of gender and not just archetypal "maleness." The

commitment to creating an open safe space is also reflected in the music she programs for the ensemble. As she explained,

it's not these sea chanties all the time. It's not these "Yale Glee Club" series types of pieces anymore. I think that the topics we choose to discuss and the text we discuss is different now than it was twenty years ago. I think language is evolving and needs to continue to evolve. The openness and willingness not to shy away from the transgendered voice, and creating that environment needs to be ok...because they just want a place to feel, I hate to put quotes on it, but "normal" (personal communication, August 23, 2017).

Wendy admitted that she has not encountered any transgendered students yet in her choir, due perhaps in part to the faith-based community and beliefs of the university. More research is needed to provide choral professionals with resources on transgendered vocal pedagogy so that choirs can continue to be safe spaces for all singers.

### **Novice Singers**

Across the three cases studied, the theme of novice played a vital role in the rehearsal environment of each men's choir. Ramsey's study revealed one of the subthemes of brotherhood was support (Ramsey, 2013) This was reflected in the following quote from one of the singers, "We're gonna support each other here. If somebody's struggling with some pitches, we're all gonna support that person" (p. 86). While Ramsey's study was of a high school men's choir, parallel themes of brotherhood and support experienced in postsecondary schools were found in all three cases studied.

Lauren's mission to create a non-auditioned choir where everyone is welcome to sing required her to create an environment that welcomed highly skilled and trained

singers along with novices. The majority of the singers in Lauren's choir are non-music majors. If they are music majors, most are instrumentalists with varying experiences in vocal music. Because of this, Lauren focuses on selecting literature of varying levels and also teaches by rote, especially at the beginning of the semester. In the rehearsal that I observed, she taught the singers the Jeffrey Ames' arrangement of *Tshotsholoza*. By teaching a piece without requiring the singers to read notation, both novice and experienced singers were engaged and quickly successful. As pointed out in the previous section, one of Lauren's non-music-major singers reflected on a moment such as this as the defining moment for his commitment to the ensemble: "So we didn't have sheet music, I never sung but I could do something and by the end, it was all around me like this melody we had created, it was very beautiful. I had never been in something like that, so yeah, it was a big moment for me" (personal communication, August 24, 2017).

The ability to achieve a high level of musicianship despite varying levels of vocal experience does not go unnoticed by members of the ensemble, especially the music education majors. Many of Lauren's students commented on how much they respected her conducting and teaching abilities. One stated, "Dr. L is able to intertwine basics with musicality" (personal communication, August 24, 2017). I asked all the singers in the study if they ever felt like their needs as male singers were not adequately addressed because their conductor was female. The inability of female instructors to address the needs of male singers in choral ensembles is often linked to their absence (Koza, 1993, Freer, 2009, Williams, 2012). One of singers stated,

The only thing I've noticed is that she can't really model for us. And that is the most, like, that's the thing that I understand for a lot of people can be an issue. But I notice that's the reason why she is so much more

creative with everything else because it's very easy if you're a man to be able to model and be, like, sound like this. Whereas, if her voice literally, physically, can't do it, she has to, like, plant that seed in other people. I think that fosters leadership within our group a lot more. I think it's an opportunity, I don't necessarily think that it's a negative (personal communication, August 25, 2017).

Lauren takes her job as both a vocal instructor and choral teacher seriously. She is adamant that choral professionals have an understanding of the vocal apparatus. In order to increase her own education, she “sat in on master classes—bass master classes and tenor master classes—and watched how they taught those students. I listened, I paid attention, and then through trial and error you learn. I use a lot of analogies because sometimes I just can't model. But I can tell them what it feels like” (personal communication, August 23, 2017). Both the novice and more experienced singers interviewed from Lauren's choir all expressed confidence in Lauren as both a conductor and voice teacher. They uniformly agreed that they never felt like their needs as male singers were not adequately met with a female conductor and reiterated that the community built in the choir provided a space where they felt safe and supported by their peers to explore their own voices and grow as singers and musicians.

Wendy's students also expressed total confidence in her abilities as a conductor and teacher. She is not afraid to say that her own tools and techniques are borrowed and learned from the countless other conductors that she has observed over the years. Of the three cases, Wendy's choir is the only one that is auditioned. She has turned down a few male students who could not match pitch. Despite the fact that it is an auditioned ensemble, Wendy still works with novice singers and musicians as most of her singers

are not music majors. In fact, the current group that she conducts has only six students majoring in music out of forty-nine. Because of this, Wendy spends more time on vocal development skills during her warm-ups as well as working on music in sectional rehearsals to help the less-experienced singers gain success more quickly. The interviews with Wendy's singers uniformly demonstrated a high level of respect for her as a pedagogue. One student told me, "We don't go against her at any cost, like don't disobey, because she is *teaching* us something" (personal communication, August 30, 2017). They all reiterated to me how lucky they felt to have her as their conductor. They appreciate her vast knowledge of the voice and music. I interviewed a choral music education major in the choir and asked him what he felt he has gained from being in the men's glee. He mentioned two things: the consistent strong community of the ensemble and the teaching example set by Wendy.

I think the biggest thing I've learned in glee club is the way that Dr. W. is able to work with students that don't have a lot of experience and see how she gets the most out of students who really, you know, aren't solid musicians, don't know a lot about music, don't know how to read music, and how she's still really about to get high quality performances out of those students. It's really incredible and something that I've tried to learn how she works that magic (personal communication, August 30, 2017).

I asked him what he attributed her magic to, and he astutely attributed it to her meticulous rehearsal planning, "I think her rehearsal structure and planning really help benefit the less experienced choir members" (personal communication, August 30, 2017). I observed her planning in action during my week observation. Before every rehearsal, Wendy wrote out her rehearsal plan to include the warm-up exercises, order of the music, and goals for

each piece. It was inspiring to see someone who has as much experience as she does continue to take the time to prepare and plan. One of the non-music majors spoke passionately about all he has learned in glee club. He elaborated,

As a singer she has taught us about rhythm. She has taught us about tonality, getting in tune. I mean her ear is incredible. I feel that my singing has gotten 200 percent better under her. And I never thought that just because her voice wasn't lower that I wasn't able to learn well. She also takes advantage of sometimes using a male who's good at the part as a model, and she'll be like, listen to him sing it.... I think she is incredible. She knows her stuff very well. She knows what she's teaching us extremely well, and she's been in this a long time so that definitely comes through (personal communication, August 30, 2017).

The president of the glee club and I had an enlightening conversation about his observations on the effectiveness of women conductors of men's choirs. He told me about a time the glee club had a male director for a week because Wendy was traveling. He commented that it was

definitely different with the male director because he could obviously sing a part in the male range, but when she came back from the trip nothing had changed. No one was like, oh we didn't want you to come back. Like, she's been doing it for long enough that she really knows how to address a male choir, and she knows she'll have to bang out pitches on the piano, and we never have a problem singing from pitches instead of having her sing. In fact, most of the guys say, well she can't sing where we are, but it doesn't matter because she does x, y, and z to compensate for it (personal communication, August 30, 2017).

When I asked this student if he thought it was a disadvantage for women to work with male singers, he had an interesting response: "I kind of like the opposite because I feel

like she would hear stuff in our voices that if a male was singing and directing, you're kind of blind to how your tone is, and she can tell that our tone is so different from what she would sing" (personal communication, August 30, 2017).

Just like Lauren and Wendy, Samantha spends time working on foundational vocal skills not only to build the skills of her more advanced singers, but also to teach her novice singers about their voices. The men's choir is considered both a curricular and extracurricular class at Samantha's university. Samantha explained that since the music majors have to be in two ensembles, "a male singer who is on voice scholarship has to audition for collegiate choral. And then if they are accepted into there, that's their primary ensemble, and then they usually choose the men's choir for their secondary ensemble because they have to be in two" (personal communication, September 5, 2017). This helps Samantha's choir to have a few more music majors than both Wendy's and Lauren's ensembles.

Despite having more music majors, at least half her choir is comprised of students with majors outside the music department, many first-time choral singers. In fact, Samantha thought that this year she had at least five guys out of the fifty in the group that had never sung in a choir before. She feels strongly that gendered choirs specifically help meet the needs of everybody in the choir. One of her students spoke directly to the benefits he gained as a novice singer in the ensemble. He told me, "When it came to singing and musicality I was a little self-conscious. But as the semester went by, having strong singers next to me helped grow my confidence" (personal correspondence, September 6, 2017). This philosophy is supported generally by the literature on single-sex education and the choral classroom but is usually applied specifically to middle and

high school (Ramsey, 2013; Brinson & Demorest, 2014; Freer, 2009; Williams, 2012). Currently, there is no research into single-sex education's effectiveness or necessity at the collegiate level, although the high number of novice singers enrolled in all three ensembles in this study points to the need for more research.

Throughout the interviews, Samantha's students all spoke to the strong vocal technique they were learning and how important it was for them to sing with their whole body. When I asked the interviewees if they ever felt that their needs as a singer were not adequately met, they all quickly said no and went on to reiterate how knowledgeable Samantha was about the voice. One of them, the music education student but first-time choral singer stated, "I know that she has helped a couple of the members in the ensemble with their voice and helped them be more in tune. She just knows what to fix, and I'm very confident in her" (personal communication, September 7, 2017). Another instrumental music education student commented that a big difference for him from his high school choral experiences was that "She [Samantha] just knows guys really well, like just what their bodies do. She knows a lot about anatomy and what our voices do, so it seems to me that she is able to convey that really well. She has a very extensive knowledge and she definitely knows what she is doing" (personal communication, September 7, 2017). The students that I interviewed all told me about how Samantha had gone to do a special certification on the structure of the human body where she had to dissect human cadavers. They were quite impressed with that.

The last student that I interviewed was also the president of the men's choir. He told me that one of the reasons that he joined the men's choir was to become a better singer. I asked him if he felt like he had achieved this goal, and he stated,

I hoped to become a better singer overall, but I didn't know just how much it would help me because Dr. Smith is so good at, like, finding the small things to work on with the whole ensemble. She literally has people in the palm of her hand. She knows how to get people to work, and she knows how to get people to sing to their full potential (personal communication, September 6, 2017).

This student also sings in Samantha's top mixed choir, so he has the unique perspective that comes from participating in both ensembles. I asked him what the main difference was between the two ensembles, and he stated,

In collegiate chorale it's very professional and it's very serious, but it's also like everyone that's in there wants to be in there to make the best music that they can. So, it's still a good feeling for sure. But in men's choir, some of these guys have never sang before so [Samantha] is having to work on teaching just small things like basic music. She's just trying to get everyone to learn the basics of music along with learning how to sing. So, it's cool when you get those people who already know the basics and already know how to sing well to come together and make music (personal communication, September 6, 2017).

It was interesting to observe that part of the strength of the men's choir communities at each university stemmed from the rehearsal environment creating a safe place for untrained and insecure singers to explore their vocal potential. One of the ways that each conductor created the environment conducive to such vulnerability was through the student leadership. The next section will examine each choir's student leadership structure and how it impacted the success of each ensemble.

## **Empowering Student Leadership**

The first glee clubs in the United States at Yale, Harvard, and the University of Michigan were considered to be extracurricular student-run organizations with elected officials that helped lead the ensembles both in and outside of the rehearsals (Jones, 2010). As some glee clubs gained acceptance into the framework of the college music programs over the years, formalized student leadership maintained its prominence in the standard glee club model (pg. 48). Lauren defines her role as a conductor/facilitator of her men's choir. She has established student leadership positions that include president, vice president, treasurer, secretary, and ambassador. Students for the positions are nominated and voted on by the members in the ensemble, and the terms run from December to December. Lauren meets with her officers at least twice a month. During my observation, she held a Google Hangout meeting with the officers one evening at nine p.m. because they could not all get together during the day. Besides the officers, each section has a leader to help with musical questions, lovingly referred to as the "section daddy." The officers are integral in helping with recruiting and fundraising along with organizing social events for the guys in the group. The big focus in the meeting that I observed was brainstorming ideas for how to raise money for their upcoming performance at Carnegie Hall and recruit new members. Lauren's focus on family and brotherhood in this ensemble, and her position as "facilitator," puts responsibility on the members to build their community. While it was apparent to me in my week with the choir that the students understood and shared her vision for the ensemble, the execution of this vision was not consistent. Perhaps that is due in part to the age of the ensemble and the fact that her senior members had only been in the group for two full years. The

framework has been built for students to take charge, and Lauren is quick to encourage and applaud when it occurs.

I try to be more the facilitator, try to maybe seem like it's their idea sometimes. And it's not really their idea, but it makes me so happy when things like this happen: We got back from our Chicago trip, and two days after we got back they'd started this GroupMe together. They were having withdrawals so they all got together at somebody's house, and I was so happy. This is what I want. I want them to want to be together (personal communication, August 23, 2017).

While Lauren's group has only existed for two and a half years, Wendy's ensemble is over a hundred years old, with well-established, elaborate student leadership design. Wendy described the elections process for members of the glee club leadership cabinet,

It takes two whole rehearsals (which I hate), but they have nominations for the positions, and practically everybody in the group gets nominated. And they have all these people running for the positions so then they start with the lowest one, not the highest one. And they each give a two-minute speech, and then the group questions them. Then they leave the room, and the group talks about them. And then they vote on a little piece of paper. They collect it. They call them in. Then the people who lost, they write it on the board can elect to run for the next position. It takes forever. There are nine positions in the cabinet: president, vice president, who is also the chaplain, social chair, business manager, assistant business manager, secretary, librarian, publicity manager, and alumni board person who is appointed by me (personal communication, August 29, 2017).

The cabinet meets with Wendy every week, but she does not run the meeting. She is there to "keep on top of what they're doing because they can get kind of off on their own

easily” (personal communication, August 29, 2017). It is interesting to note that the leadership positions in Wendy’s group are responsible for everything outside of the music-making in the ensemble. She does not have section leaders that help with music. It is clear from the rehearsals that the members of the choir take their leadership roles seriously and help each other out as needed. They also encourage others to behave and pay attention. I asked Wendy what she thought helped instill the group’s strong sense of camaraderie and team work, and she told me, “for the glee club, a lot of it comes from within the group. I’ve had some really strong leadership that has taken that on themselves” (personal communication, August 29, 2017). One of the students I interviewed who is also on the cabinet as the assistant business manager described it as, “[Dr. W.] has a very low tolerance for talking and stuff like that, and she just doesn’t allow that. She cuts it out very quickly. She uses the club also to help encourage that. We’re turning to people, like you know, this is how we do things” (personal communication, August 30, 2017).

Outside of the rehearsal the student leadership takes their responsibility as stewards to their campus community seriously, as well. Because they are at a small, mostly undergraduate institution of roughly 3,000 students that requires most of their students to live on campus, the glee club cabinet has perhaps had an easier time organizing social events without the assistance of Wendy. Another student I interviewed who is not on the cabinet commented about the club’s reputation on their campus. He explained that

there is a bit of a reputation of the glee club. What most people would say is that it’s the closest thing that we have to a fraternity. It’s just a bunch of guys who are always goofy together and can sometimes be exclusive, have

tons of traditions that no one understands, and I can totally understand how for a lot of people that rubs them the wrong way. Especially other musical ensembles I find just get annoyed by us from time to time. And I can understand that. And we try our best to counteract that as much as possible. Throughout the year, we try to do a general service project for the community. One of these projects is writing letters of encouragement to all the freshmen at the beginning of the year just letting them know that we're praying for you (personal communication, August 30, 2017).

I was also able to interview the president of the glee club and ask him how the traditions of the club were passed down. He told me that a lot of the traditions were kept up through the members of the cabinet. As president, he was given a binder that included documents pertaining the glee club that has been passed down through the decades. I asked him who was in charge of recruiting for the choir, and he told me that the cabinet takes the lead with coordination from Wendy. But I got the sense from him that the students take a strong sense of ownership in the success of the glee club. He told me, "The cabinet gets to campus two days before orientation week starts, and then we man a table in the student center with sign-up sheets and try to get people to come to our auditions" (personal communication, August 30, 2017). Both the environment built in Wendy's men's choir through her consistent commitment to their musical excellence and the ensemble's hundred-year-old traditions have combined to build a strong, student empowered leadership model.

While Samantha's men's choir does not have a hundred-year history to maintain, there is a sense of a consistent, strong student driven leadership environment in the ensemble. When I observed the men's rehearsal, for example, Samantha did not need to communicate to her officers any information about how

the rehearsal needed to start. We walked into the room and the men were already organized passing out music, signing people in, and greeting new members. In our interview, Samantha described the leadership structure of the group,

We have an executive council that works with me and we try to meet at least every two weeks. The structure in the ensemble works this way: members in the group ask their section leaders about musical or logistical questions. Each section has two section leaders, one musical section leader and one assistant section leader who is really there for the logistical things. So that's like the non-music guy who wants to take on a leadership role, who can deal with the uniform questions and the music turning in questions and what side do I wear my pin on, etc. And then the musical guy runs sectionals when we have sectionals. Those section leaders report to the executive council, which consists of the president, treasurer, and chairs of each of the committees—promotions, fundraising, alumni, and education (personal communication, September 5, 2017).

The structure of Samantha's leadership team model allowed both confident and less confident musicians to take ownership in the group. The singers vote on the executive council members in the spring while Samantha herself appoints the section leaders. Samantha empowers her student leaders equally in musical and social roles. She even has the president conduct a piece on one of their concerts.

The students in Samantha's choir describe the environment of the rehearsal as "a comforting and safe place" (personal communication, September 6, 2017). Because of this, some of the singers feel free to share the personal connections they have with music. One such example stemmed from an interview I had with a new member of the ensemble. The choir was preparing to perform Mahler's Second Symphony in collaboration with the other university choirs and orchestra. In his words,

I told Dr. S. what the piece meant to me, and she asked me if I would like to speak to the whole choir. And so, I stood in front of 172 people and talk about the piece and what it meant to me and people were just coming up to me afterwards and saying, aw man, that's really cool. I showed them I really love to sing and that it's a great passion of mine. And it really helped me to feel a part of the choir at that point (personal communication, September 7, 2017).

One of the other students that I interviewed wanted to make sure that I knew how much he valued the sense of ownership that Samantha gave to the ensemble and how much that led to the success of the group, in his opinion. He told me that

She lets a lot of the section leaders run their own things. She has the ability to not micromanage, not be controlling of things. There's this underlying current that you have to do your part because everyone expects you to. She won't micromanage and, like, force you to do it, but she is just fine with section leaders or the president of the choir or everyone else running the show (personal communication, September 7, 2017).

This type of leadership works well in the ensemble not only because Samantha is "hands off" and lets the ensemble member "run the show," but also because she has established a personal connection with each member. It is that personal connection that empowers the students to feel like a valued and an integral part of the organization. The president said it this way, "I think the moment that hooked me was the fourth or fifth day, and Dr. S. pulled me aside before rehearsal and had a conversation with me, and I really appreciated that because she strives to know every single student and be there for them, and she works hard for her students, and I appreciate that" (personal communication, September 7, 2017).

The rehearsal environments established by each conductor were unique and yet shared some common themes: strong sense of community that included novice singers and providing members a safe space to explore their voice and feel accepted by their brothers. The students interviewed uniformly viewed their conductors as experts in the field and did not feel like their needs as male singers were not met due to the gender of their instructor. In fact, some described it as a benefit, an example of strength in teaching and adaptability. Traditions played a prominent role in building both a sense of community and ownership in the ensembles, especially when the students felt empowered to make an impact with their leadership.

### **Challenges**

As outlined in the literature review, the percentage of women choral conductors working at the collegiate level is still disproportionate to their male colleagues, especially outside of music education and treble voice ensembles (VanWeelden 2003, Conlon 2009). Each conductor was asked her opinions on why there are so few women conductors of college men's choirs and to outline some of the challenges associated with conducting men's choirs. The themes that emerged and were explored include lack of opportunity and lack of quality repertoire.

### **Lack of Opportunity**

Each conductor was asked why she thought there were so few women conductors of men's choirs at the college level. Lauren's answer focused on the divide between men and women in college teaching jobs.

I think that it's been a good ol' boys club for a really long time. If you look at the sheer numbers of how many women are actually in higher

education, the conducting roles, there's a lot in music education. But how many women are in prominent, particularly division one director of choral activities (DCA) jobs. There are not that many. Most of the DCAs will conduct the top mixed choir and the men's chorus, and then the women get the second choir and the women's' glee. And so that is traditionally how it's been in most places. I think here, to be honest with you, if I hadn't started the men's choir, I don't know that I'd be conducting it (personal communication, August 23, 2017).

Lauren was able to create the men's choir and therefore give herself an opportunity that might not have existed otherwise. Wendy echoed Lauren's sentiments about the lack of women conductors of college men's choirs. She feels strongly that there are two main reasons for their absence, She told me, "I think there's a bias against women conducting at the college level generally, except for women's choirs" (personal communication, August 29, 2017). I asked her if she had personally experienced this bias and she said, "I look back at jobs, you know, where I was as well qualified as men, and I didn't even get a chance. I've also been kind of told, well no, because this is your expertise [referring to women's choirs]" (personal communication, August 29, 2017). Wendy also felt that part of the issue resulted from the fact that there are not many college men's choirs. This could be due in part to the lower number of men singing in colleges, which consequently leads to fewer men's choirs and fewer opportunities to conduct them. Couple that with the perceived bias against women conducting anything other than a women's choir, and it is not hard to understand why there are so few women working in this capacity. I asked Wendy what advice she would give a woman conductor and she said, "you gotta be good. You gotta be better than the men. I hate to say that you do, but you have to be. You have

to be yourself, love what you do, and be good at it” (personal communication, August 29, 2017).

Samantha also felt like there was a bias against women conducting men’s choirs, but she attributed it more to a lack of opportunity and that college men’s choirs are just not that common. She went on to say,

First of all, not every college has a men’s choir. And then if you look at the choral people in collegiate or university level positions, the head person is usually a man and the second person is usually a woman. And then the head person usually does the top mixed choir and something else. I think there is a bias just because of the numbers. But I think there is more of a bias for women conducting men’s choirs than there is for men conducting women’s choirs. And I don’t know why. But I think I have a theory that, at least at the collegiate level for women’s choirs, because that head person was usually a man, that’s who conducted the women’s choir and there’s always going to be a women’s choir because there’s always more women (personal communication, September 5, 2017).

Samantha was able to overcome this potential bias because she was hired as the director of choral activities. She got to choose the opportunity to conduct the men’s choir. I asked her what advice she would give to a female conductor that wanted to work with a men’s choir. She said to “do it! It’ll be scary, but it will be the most rewarding musical, spiritual, and social experience” (personal communication, September 5, 2017). Her mantra is simple, yet poignant: “good teaching is good teaching, good singing is good singing. If you teach them well and you teach them how to sing, that is valuable to the individual and valuable to the ensemble” (personal communication, September 5, 2017). The three women studied were able to create opportunities to conduct men’s choirs

because they felt strongly about their ability to add value to the ensembles. The real or perceived bias against their gender did not stop them. More research is needed to explore bias against women specifically with regard to hiring practices in college music departments. It would also be worth a study to examine how many women allow a perceived bias to eliminate them from potential opportunities, such as conducting a college men's choir.

### **Lack of Quality Repertoire**

*“Choral music educators should take great care as they program repertoire for male singers. Teachers determine the greater part of their choral curriculum by the repertoire they choose. With this in mind, it is important for educators to consider what musical and personal avenues can be opened by each piece of music”* (Ramsey, 2013 p. 209).

The three conductors interviewed for this study all have varying levels of time and experience working with college men's choirs, yet a consistent theme emerged when discussing some of the challenges they faced: repertoire. Wendy has worked with the men's choir and in choral music the longest of the three conductors. She is in her thirty-eighth year of collegiate teaching, and she admits to still struggling with finding quality repertoire that works. She told me that “it's like they just have this narrow range of tessitura that works. And occasionally we'll get a piece and we'll sing it and we'll go, this just sounds awful, you know” (personal communication, August 29, 2017). I asked Wendy what resources she uses to find quality repertoire, and she mentioned spending some time with Jerry Blackstone at the University of Michigan early in her tenure with the men's choir. She admitted that she often has to repeat music in men's choir because she knows what will work. She told me that she feels like there is not much new being published each year, “it's so hard because there's so much written for the women and so

little for the men. It's really frustrating" (personal communication, August 29, 2017).

Because there is not as much new material being published, I asked her if she used some of the older music arranged for men's voices. She replied, "Those classic, old Harvard Glee Club, Harvard arrangements of SATB things, I tend to stay away from. I find it just depends" (personal communication, August 29, 2017).

In the early days of the Harvard Glee Club, Jameson Marvin arranged numerous "traditional" SATB choral pieces for men's voices to help change the club's reputation as performers of just drinking and college fight songs (Jones, 2010). Wendy balances the repertoire of her choir between sacred and lighter, fun music because in her words, "it's part of the shtick of men's glee club" (personal communication, August 29, 2017). As our conversation progressed on the topic of repertoire, Wendy spoke of recent work that the men performed that was more substantive.

I was really touched by a thing that Eugene [Rogers] from the University of Michigan did, the *Seven Last Words*. I really would like to do that but it's such a big work, so I did a little section with *Prayer of the Children* and the Casal's *O Vos Omnes, Blow Ye the Trumpet* by Kirke Meechem, and *Father of Light* by Craig Courtney, which is about suicide (personal communication, August 29, 2017).

The exploration into music with challenging texts and deeper meaning is changing the formulaic programming of traditional men's choirs. Perhaps as a younger professor, Lauren's programming and ideas on appropriate repertoire were the furthest removed from the "men's choir shtick." In her opinion,

Society's changing. And I think topics that are being discussed and literature that's being written is changing. It's not these sea chanties all the time, not these Yale glee club series types of pieces anymore. So, I think

that in and of itself and the topics we choose to discuss and the text we discuss is different now than it was twenty years ago (personal communication, August 23, 2017).

Because Lauren does not want to use some of these traditional men's choir pieces; she seeks out composers and commissions them. She also relies on the composition majors at her university to write for her group. She is adamant about not buying repertoire that is an adaptation of a piece for men's voices. I asked her where she gets her ideas for repertoire and her response was YouTube, attending live concerts, and reaching out to her former graduate student cohort network for help. It was interesting to note that none of the women interviewed for this study had another female conductor of men's choirs that they could reach out to for advice and support. Samantha and Wendy had interacted with each other one time in their capacities as men's choir directors for a panel discussion at an ACDA convention. Wendy told me that she was shocked at how many people turned out to their panel which was geared toward women working successfully with male singers. Neither Wendy nor Samantha knew Lauren or her work at her university with the men's choir and as the most junior faculty member of the three, could have benefited from the mentorship of the other two conductors.

Samantha also struggles with finding repertoire for her men's choir. As she told me

that is the bane of my existence. I am telling you, because one, I don't feel like that's a forte of mine, choosing repertoire. Well, I should say that's a huge challenge for me. If I find good pieces, I think I'm pretty good at fitting them together and seeing connections. But resources for repertoire, that's hard for me. I don't always know where to go, especially for male choir stuff. I've found in recent years that I talk to people, and I ask them

what they're doing. And I talk to the composers, and I find myself repeating composers. I also love the publisher, *earthsongs*. They're my go-to because I can always find something. And all of the Estonian music that's being published now, that's a treasure trove. But my best years with my men's choir were with programs that were great music. And I can't always find great music, I can find some good stuff, but that's not going to make them stay (personal communication, September 5, 2017).

Samantha's assertion that the music is a large part of the men connecting and wanting to stay in the group was reflected in their interviews. I asked them to tell me about the "moment" that hooked them and connected them into the group. One of her students said this:

I can't remember what piece it was, I think it was I weep for Jesus or something like that, and just creating this, this style of music. It was very sad, and I think just the emotions that the ensemble gave and then the different stylistic things we put into it, I was like, ok, this is really cool. And then there's other moments where we create this gigantic chord, and you can hear when it's all in tune when everybody just like, fits, and I think one of the things that draws me in is just big chords (personal communication, September 6, 2017).

Samantha's student could not remember the name of the song, but he remembered how it made him feel. One of Lauren's students struggled with a piece that they performed that is considered by many to be part of the standard men's choir choral canon. This student enjoys being a part of the men's choir but struggles with the perception of sameness and exclusion that an all-male group can inadvertently create. He told me,

There was a song that was called *There's Nothing Like a Dame*. That song I actually have a bit of a problem with, that boy's club image. So, we're

talking about dames, there's nothing like a dame, the curvy dame, it's so beautiful, that's all we want, we're men. It's like, I can be very uncomfortable being that image of a male choir. I think it's classic and novel, but I think we could do things that less relied on our image as a male's choir and more as a choir (personal communication, August 24, 2017).

A similar situation arose in my own experience with the men's choir at the University of Washington when my colleague programmed the Kurt Knecht piece, *Manly Men*. While its message is to empower male singing, it pokes fun at women singers in the process: "but though we may not always inspire, at least we're not a women's choir." (JW Pepper, 2018). Some members of the ensemble expressed their discomfort singing the piece to me. They understood its comedic value but did not feel that it represented them and were uncomfortable with gender stereotypes that the piece perpetuated. Ramsey's study revealed a similar conclusion in regard to repertoire for men's choir. She remarked,

it is vital that teachers of male choruses are cognizant of repertoire that perpetuates male gender stereotypes. Sea chanteys and work songs, while longstanding components of standard male chorus repertoire, are not the only options for men who sing. Teachers can facilitate greater artistry among male singers and broaden singers' personal horizons through exploring a full range of musical genres, styles, and sensitivities (Ramsey, 2013, p. 209).

The singers and conductors interviewed were all in agreement that quality repertoire is one the key ingredients to the appeal of a men's choir experience. However, the conductors in this study faced the challenge of finding consistently high-quality repertoire for their singers. Their network of resources for finding this repertoire

appeared small, as well. It is clear that the choral community needs to do a better job of sharing information and resources across the field when it comes to male choral repertoire. Moreover, more composers are needed to write music for men's voices that uses quality texts, embraces all expressions of gender, and consists of vocal lines tailored to bring out the beauty of the male instrument.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSIONS

#### **Introduction**

In this instrumental collective case study, I spent a week interviewing three different women conductors of college men's choirs and their students and observing their rehearsals. Lauren Lucas (Case #1) works at a large research institution located in a large city in the southern part of the United States. Wendy Walters (Case #2) is at a small liberal arts Christian college in a midwestern state. Samantha Smith (Case #3) works at a medium-sized land grant public university in the western part of the United States. I asked each conductor to identify three members of her ensemble that represented a new member in the group, a music major, a non-music major, and a long-time member with a leadership position.

Emergent themes were organized into the following areas: motivation, rehearsal environment, and challenges associated with conducting a men's choir. In the area of motivations, the theme of trailblazer was explored and included the three subthemes of challenge and opportunity, passion, and authenticity. The rehearsal environment focused on three themes: community, novice singers, and empowering student leadership. Within the larger theme of community, subthemes of family, traditions, and safe place permeated the language used by both the conductors and students. Finally, each conductor was asked her opinion on why there are so few women conductors of college men's choirs and to also outline some of the challenges associated with conducting men's choirs. The themes that emerged were lack of opportunity and lack of quality repertoire.

## **Conclusions and Implications**

In this study I examined the experiences and challenges of three women conductors working with college men's choirs. While the results of the findings in this study should not be generalized to other choral settings or teachers, the interpretations of the research questions may provide useful insights for other choral music educators.

**How do women choral conductors describe their motivations for working with college men's choirs?** The women in this study were motivated by the challenge that conducting a men's choir provided. They understood that not many women were working at the collegiate level in this capacity. Yet, each demonstrated a drive and passion to overcome any perceived bias and sought out opportunities for herself. They also share a strong sense of self, which gave them the confidence to (a) found a men's choir, (b) seize an opportunity to conduct a historic men's group, and (c) choose to conduct a men's choir when other options were available. Each woman demonstrated passion for different aspects of conducting her ensemble. For example, Lauren was passionate about creating a safe space for anyone that identified with tenors and basses to come and sing. This was especially important at her university, which did not have any non-auditioned choral ensembles. Her choir provided a place for the novice singer and vocal performance major to come together in the same ensemble. Wendy was passionate about being both a musical and spiritual role model. In the conservative religious environment of her school, she also felt strongly about showing her students that women can be successful both at home and in the professional world. In many ways, Samantha found her calling in conducting men's choirs. She lit up when she talked about her students and the experiences they shared in men's choir. She is passionate about sharing

her knowledge of the voice with them and giving them the tools to become the best singers they can be.

The passions of these women, however, are surpassed only by their authenticity. They do not change who they are to fit a stereotype of what women should do in order to be successful in front of a men's choir. In observing both Wendy and Samantha conducting different types of choral ensembles, I did not notice any real change in their personality or demeanor from group to group. Delivery of instruction changed slightly due to the auditioned nature of Samantha's mixed gender choir, but both conductors did not try to "be like the men" or change from their authentic selves. They also maintained connections to their authentic selves in their dress and appearance. Lauren chose to make a bold statement by wearing "badass red high heels" to conduct, while Wendy still "wore her pearls." She did feel it was important to connect with her men in concert by wearing their same blazer and tie but did not feel it necessary to wear a tuxedo. Samantha makes the choice to wear pants when she conducts because she is more comfortable that way, and it helps her connect and feel more grounded in her body. It is important to recognize that none of these three women made wardrobe choices based on a perceived expectation for women conductors. All three conductors wanted to connect with their men's choirs while onstage through their dress and appearance. Each was able to do so without losing connection to their authentic self.

**How do these conductors describe the rehearsal environment in their college men's choir?** Each rehearsal environment and community created by the women in this study was different. However, they shared many commonalities with the traditions found and studied in men's choirs by Ramsey (2013), Faulkner (2004), Freer (2006, 2009), and

Williams (2012) as outlined earlier as part of the literature review. The themes of community, brotherhood, family, and safe place were identified in each of the three rehearsal environments. In Lauren's choir, the men rehearse in a circle that encourages teamwork and unity. She instills a strong sense of family and brotherhood amongst the men and is actively engaged in providing a safe space for her singers. This includes welcoming transgendered students into her choir and exploring music that moves beyond the traditional male choir repertoire. Wendy's men's choir is full of traditions and rituals that have been passed down through generations of members over the 111 years of its existence. She creates an environment in her rehearsal that is focused, fast-paced, and no-nonsense. Yet, within that framework, she allows the men to perform their rituals and empowers student leaders to help ensure that the mission of the choir is fulfilled. Samantha's rehearsal is full of exercises that combine music with physical movement. Her training in Laban-based movement informs her conducting and teaching in all her ensembles. Her men's choir has a strong sense of community that is built on a foundation of student leadership that includes both musical and nonmusical support. It was interesting to discover through the interviews of the students that none of them felt like their needs as a male singer were not met with a women conductor. In fact, many spoke of the strengths of their conductor's ability to find workarounds to overcome their inability to model. All the women felt strongly about the importance of understanding the voice. This proved to be especially important in these ensembles because all three women worked with a number of novice singers and first-time choral participants.

In conclusion, there were no perceived or verbalized negative feelings or concerns shared by the singers about the gender of their conductors. I asked each singer if he

thought the gender of his conductor mattered to his experience, and each answered quickly that no, it did not. It is important to note that there is potential for unconscious bias to skew their answers due to the fact that I was a woman conductor interviewing them. Nonetheless, it is my opinion that their answers were sincere and representative of my observations of the rehearsal environments at each school.

By examining rehearsal environment in men's choirs with women conductors, the concept of community and brotherhood is also challenged. Is it still a brotherhood when there is a woman present? In Ramsey's study, brotherhood was defined using words such as support, pride and camaraderie (Ramsey, 2013). Not once was the term maleness used in relationship to brotherhood. Perhaps it is implied, however it is my assertion that its usage to describe community is more gender neutral. If we then determine this gender neutrality for the term brotherhood, its benefits can be felt by all those that have experienced the support, pride and camaraderie of any kind of community. Rehearsal environments and communities evolve and change based on the make-up of the individuals present. The work of this study has shown me that there is no magic formula for creating a rehearsal environment that will automatically invoke brotherhood in men's choirs. Rather, it is imperative that the conductor be authentic and true to their own strengths and passions and feel limitless when seeking out opportunities to conduct and lead, regardless of their gender.

In order to prepare the next generation of conductors to feel that there are no barriers to desired positions, a better representation of all genders and ethnic diversity needs to be present at the highest levels of leadership in post-secondary education. It is important to note that all three of the women conductors studied for this project were

Caucasian. While this was not a desired outcome, it brings up the need for the choral community to continue examining ways in which to cultivate the next generation of choral leaders from all ethnic and gender backgrounds.

**How do these conductors define the challenges of working with male singers?**

The challenges defined by these three conductors included a lack of opportunity and a lack of repertoire. Each conductor believed that part of the reason more women were not conducting college men's choirs was because there simply are not that many college men's choirs in the United States. It was beyond the scope of this study to determine exactly how many college men's choirs are currently active in the United States.

However, the Intercollegiate Men's Chorus (IMC) roster currently includes forty-five collegiate men's choir member choruses (Intercollegiate Men's Choruses, n.d.). It is interesting to note that only two of the current forty-five-member choirs have women conductors, and none of the women surveyed as part of this study are members of the IMC. I asked all three women about whether they were involved with the IMC, and they intimated that it still felt very much like a "good ol' boys club", (personal communication, August 29, 2017). None of them had reached out to become a member. In my opinion, it is imperative for organizations, such as the IMC to increase their visibility, especially if the desire is to promote and encourage the next generation of male singers. Even though all three women conductors recalled receiving advice and support from other men's choir directors at some point in their careers, none of them had a strong network of support that offered them advice or resources specific to men's choral music. This led to the other major challenge of conducting a college men's choir—finding quality literature.

All three conductors struggled with finding new music that would appeal to their singers and work well with their voices. Lauren's answer was to commission new compositions and work with her student composers to help fill in the gaps in their repertoire. Wendy admitted that she had to repeat more music with her men's choir than she did with the women's choir because it was harder to find good pieces that fit her men's voices. Samantha also struggled with repertoire but was finding that the newly published music out of the Baltic region was bringing some exciting possibilities for quality repertoire. But she too tended to repeat music more often with the men than she did in her mixed ensemble.

It is not hard to imagine that there are many people, working in situations where they feel all alone and yearn for some type of mentorship or guidance. If the choral profession wants to continue to promote the existence of gendered choirs, more needs to be done to connect those working with these choirs in the field, at all levels. Composers need to be commissioned to write music with texts that connect to our modern singers and perhaps more modern editions of historic repertoire, so that music is not lost to history. Women working in positions like that of a men's choir conductor also need to be more assertive about reaching out and building communities with other conductors working in similar situations. These communities ideally should be inclusive of all conductors and not necessarily just women conductors. If we are to encourage gender stereotyping and bias to change, it is imperative that knowledge be shared across the genders to ensure that no one is left out.

## **Final Thoughts**

The findings in this study represent the stories of three women conductors who are working successfully in an ensemble setting that, due to societal gender roles, was historically less open for them. As a choral conductor who has worked with men's choirs, it was inspiring to learn about their individual stories and the paths they traversed through the choral profession. Having the opportunity to interview women in three different stages in their careers provided valuable insight into the challenges and struggles that emerge along the professional journey of a college professor. Recommendations for more study on women who are working in fields or areas that were traditionally seen as just for men is needed to continue to break down unconscious biases toward certain career opportunities. If gendered choirs are to continue to be a part of the future of choral music education, more needs to be done to create a system of shared knowledge for all conductors regardless of their gender. This includes women's choral communities being more inclusive and welcoming of male conductors as well.

Worldviews surrounding the definitions of gender roles and stereotyping in the workforce are changing rapidly. Choral music needs to be on the forefront of the conversation of inclusivity in ensembles. More research needs to be done on how gendered choirs are adapting to support their singers' varied expressions of gender and how to best support the transgender singer. It is my hope that this research will add to the mounting body of work that empowers women to seek out opportunities that fall outside of traditional gender roles.

All three of the women in this study shared a strong sense of self and the courage to be trailblazers as conductors of college men's choirs. They created communities where

their male students felt safe to explore their voices and express themselves through music. The singers spoke of the brotherhood and community in their choirs and how the ensembles were more like a family than a class. Their experiences mirrored those of other men's choir participants studied that had male directors. The only difference in their experience was that their brotherhood contained one sister.

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## APPENDIX A

### Initial Request for Participation

Greetings:

You are invited to participate in a research study investigating the career paths of women choral conductors of collegiate men's choirs. I am conducting this study as a DMA candidate at the University of Washington under the supervision of Dr. Giselle Wyers, Professor of Choral Music, Dr. Geoffrey Boers, Director of Choral Activities, and Dr. Steven Morrison, Professor of Music Education. My goal through this project is to gain an understanding of the encouragements and/or challenges that you experienced during your education and career as a female choral conductor and the circumstances that brought you to conducting collegiate men's choirs. If you decide to participate, I will ask you to allow me to interview you about your educational and professional career and potentially set up in-person observations of both you and your ensemble.

Information collected through your participation will be used to meet dissertation requirements, submitted for publication in a professional journal, and/or presented at professional meetings. Your identity will remain confidential through de-identification of data as well as storage of data in a secure location. However, you can choose to waive your right to confidentiality at any point in the research process.

Your decision whether or not to participate will have no impact on your future relations with your school or the University of Washington. Note that you may withdraw from participation at any time, without penalty.

As a result of your participation in this project, the choral profession will have the opportunity to better understand the various career paths available to women conductors. Participants in previous studies have expressed enjoyment at sharing their stories. I cannot, however, promise that you will receive any personal benefit from participation. No compensation will be offered for participating in the research study.

If you agree to participate, please respond to this email with the following information:

The dates of your fall semester/quarter (August – December 2017):

Will you be conducting a collegiate male ensemble in the fall?

How long have you conducted this collegiate male ensemble? If you don't currently conduct a collegiate male ensemble but have in the past, please list the name of the ensemble and how long you conducted them.

Would you be willing to allow observation of the ensemble and potential interviews of members of the ensemble?

If you are retired or do not work with men's choir anymore, please provide your availability for a phone interview between August and December 2017.

At the time of your interview you will also receive a letter of informed consent that you will sign granting me permission to audio record the interview as well as declaring your intentions regarding confidentiality.

If you are unavailable to participate, please let me know. Thank you in advance for your consideration and your exemplary work in the choral profession.

Respectfully,

Meg Stohlmann  
Doctoral Student, University of Washington

## **APPENDIX B**

### **Consent Form for Conductors**

#### **UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON CONSENT FORM**

#### **Research Study – Women Conductors of Collegiate Men’s Choirs**

Researchers: Meg Stohlmann, DMA Candidate, Music Department,  
Dr. Steven Morrison, Dr. Geoffrey Boers, and Dr. Giselle Wyers, faculty advisors

#### **Researchers’ statement**

The purpose of this consent form is to give you the information you will need to help you decide whether to be in the study or not. Please read the form carefully. You may ask questions about the purpose of the research, what I would ask you to do, the possible risks and benefits, your rights as a volunteer, and anything else about the research or this form that is not clear. When I have answered all your questions, you can decide if you want to be in the study or not. This process is called “informed consent.” I will give you a copy of this form for your records.

#### **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this study is to document the experiences of three female conductors of collegiate men’s choirs and their choir members; the culture, rehearsal environment; and to answer the question of bias toward women conducting all-male ensembles. If so, are there pedagogical reasons for why that bias would exist or is it simply tradition?

#### **STUDY PROCEDURES**

In order to ensure a thorough representation of each case, data will be collected in multiple ways. The first will be through direct observations of the three subjects and their choirs at the beginning of the fall term, 2017. Video recording will be used to allow for an in-depth analysis of the data after the fact. Semi-structured and open-ended interviews will be conducted with each conductor along with at least three members of the ensembles selected based on time in the ensemble (new and seasoned) and leadership position. Researcher’s field notes and reflective journals will also be used to identify themes and triangulation in the data. Through the use of data coding, I will identify emergent themes related to collegiate male choirs, gender bias and choral conducting, collegiate male choir culture and traditions, and the key to each of these conductor’s success.

#### **BENEFITS OF THE STUDY**

The nature of the findings will highlight successful female choral conductors working in an area of the career field traditionally reserved for male choral conductors. This will hopefully shed light on gender bias that exists in the choral profession and potentially



## **APPENDIX C**

### **Consent Form for Singers**

#### **UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON CONSENT FORM**

#### **Research Study – Women Conductors of Collegiate Men’s Choirs**

Researchers: Meg Stohlmann, DMA Candidate, Music Department,  
Dr. Steven Morrison, Dr. Geoffrey Boers, and Dr. Giselle Wyers, faculty  
advisors

#### **Researchers’ statement**

The purpose of this consent form is to give you the information you will need to help you decide whether to be in the study or not. Please read the form carefully. You may ask questions about the purpose of the research, what I would ask you to do, the possible risks and benefits, your rights as a volunteer, and anything else about the research or this form that is not clear. When I have answered all your questions, you can decide if you want to be in the study or not. This process is called “informed consent.” I will give you a copy of this form for your records.

#### **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this study is to document the experiences of three female conductors of collegiate men’s choirs and their choir members; the culture, rehearsal environment; and to answer the question of bias toward women conducting all-male ensembles. If so, are there pedagogical reasons for why that bias would exist or is it simply tradition?

#### **STUDY PROCEDURES**

In order to ensure a thorough representation of each case, data will be collected in multiple ways. The first will be through direct observations of the three subjects and their choirs at the beginning of the fall term, 2017. Video recording will be used to allow for an in-depth analysis of the data after the fact. Semi-structured and open-ended interviews will be conducted with each conductor along with at least three members of the ensembles selected based on time in the ensemble (new and seasoned) and leadership position. Researcher’s field notes and reflective journals will also be used to identify themes and triangulation in the data. Through the use of data coding, I will identify emergent themes related to collegiate male choirs, gender bias and choral conducting, collegiate male choir culture and traditions, and the key to each of these conductor’s success.

#### **BENEFITS OF THE STUDY**

The nature of the findings will highlight successful female choral conductors working in an area of the career field traditionally reserved for male choral conductors. This will hopefully shed light on gender bias that exists in the choral profession and potentially

dispel prejudices that potentially bar employment for future female conductors at the collegiate level.

### **CONFIDENTIALITY OF RESEARCH INFORMATION**

Information collected through your participation will be used to meet dissertation requirements, published in a professional journal, and/or presented at a professional meeting/conference. Because of the nature of this study, members of the ensemble and their interview data will remain confidential through the use of pseudonyms.

### **OTHER INFORMATION**

You may refuse to participate, and you are free to withdraw from this study at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

#### Subject's statement

This study has been explained to me. I volunteer to take part in this research. I have had a chance to ask questions. If I have questions later about the research, or if I have been harmed by participating in this study, I can contact one of the researchers listed on the first page of this consent form. If I have questions about my rights as a research subject, I can call the Human Subjects Division at (206) 543-0098 or call collect at (206) 221-5940. I will receive a copy of this consent form.

---

Printed name of subject

Signature of subject

Date

Copies to:     Researcher  
                  Subject

## APPENDIX D

### Semi-Structured Interview Questions for Conductors

How do you define yourself as a professional conductor?

What are your career goals and aspirations?

Why did you decide to seek out an opportunity to conduct a men's choir?

What were your previous experiences with men's choirs?

What do you know about the history of collegiate men's choirs in the United States?

What have you done or not done to contribute to the historical culture of US collegiate men's choirs?

How do you create your rehearsal environment for your group?

Is this the same or different from mixed gender or female choirs that you have conducted? If so, how?

Describe the environment/culture of your men's choir.

How do you instill a sense of teamwork and camaraderie in this ensemble?

Describe your experiences with other men's choir directors.

Have you experienced any gender bias or challenges based on your position as a director of a men's choir? If so, please describe both positive and negative.

Do you think there is a bias against women conducting collegiate men's choirs in our profession? If so, how have you experienced this bias or observed it?

Why do you believe there are so few women conductors of men's choruses?

What is your opinion on men conducting women's choirs?

What are the pedagogical challenges, if any, that women potentially face conducting an all-male ensemble? How have you overcome or dealt with these challenges?

What is your opinion on how men's choirs should move forward, stay the same, or change in relationship to gender identity and fluidity including transgendered students?

In your opinion, should gendered choirs be a part of our choral future?

Describe the encouragements and/or challenges you experienced in your home and work life that contributed to your identity as a choral conductor.

Describe the role of your men's choir in the cultural and curricular life your university.

Who are your biggest mentors when it comes to working with male voices?

What resources do you use for selecting repertoire for your ensemble?

What resources do you use for working with the male voice?

Much of the literature on women in leadership discusses the female form. Do you believe that female conductors can embrace their femininity, or do you believe that female conductors should demonstrate more androgynous traits? How have you dealt with this in your career? Have you ever felt pressured to suppress your femininity?

Did/Do you have a mentor(s) through your education and career path? Was/Is this mentor male or female, and what was the content or tone of conversations regarding gender issues?

## **APPENDIX E**

### **Semi-Structured Interview Questions for Singers**

Why did you join the men's choir?

What do you hope to gain by being a part of this ensemble?

Why is this experience different than a mixed ensemble?

Describe your background experiences with music.

Describe the rehearsal environment of the ensemble.

Describe your experience with a female conductor of an all-male ensemble.

Is this your first time having a female conductor? If not, describe your previous experiences. If yes, describe your current experience.

What are the most important attributes you are looking for in your ensemble director?

Is the gender of your conductor important to you? Why or why not?

How do you identify yourself?

What advice would you give female conductors interested in working successfully with a men's choir?

## APPENDIX F

### Summary of Participants

**Case #1: Lauren Lucas, Conductor (Founded glee club in 2015, three years of collegiate teaching)**

Location: state-supported research university in southern United States

Ensemble enrollment: around forty singers

Students Interviewed:

- a. Non-music major sophomore, member of glee club for one year
- b. Instrumental music education major, member of glee club for two years
- c. Non-music major, founding member and former president of glee club, member for three years

**Case #2: Wendy Walters, Conductor (Glee club conductor since 2000, over 38 years of collegiate teaching)**

Location: small, liberal arts, religious affiliated university in midwestern United States

Ensemble enrollment: forty-eight singers

Students Interviewed:

- a. Non-music major sophomore, member of glee club for one year
- b. Music major junior, member of glee club for two years and part of leadership cabinet
- c. Non-music major senior and president of glee club, member for three years

**Case #3: Samantha Smith, Conductor (Glee club conductor since 2008, twelve years of collegiate teaching)**

Location: medium sized, land-grant institution in western United States

Ensemble enrollment: around sixty singers

Students Interviewed:

- a. Non-music major sophomore, member of glee club for one semester
- b. Instrumental music education major sophomore, member of glee club for one year
- c. Music major senior and president of glee club, member for four years