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Discounting Our Colleagues: Gender Inequity in the Choral Conducting Profession

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Despite public discourse and trends toward gender equality in the United States, women choral conductors have continued to be considered second-class citizens in hiring practices, pay, and treatment by their peers. The College Music Society indicates that the percentage of collegiate women choral conductors has decreased from 32.95% to 25.90% from 2006 to 2020.¹ Similar data from Chorus America and the National Collegiate Choral Organization show comparable decreases in the share of women choral conductors at the academic, professional, and community choir levels. In the orchestral world, however, things

are looking up for women in leadership. In 2013, Marin Alsop was the only woman to hold one of the world's top 100 orchestral conducting positions.² As of 2023, there are now eight women filling these positions.³

A 2018 research study from the Berklee Institute for Creative Entrepreneurship documented three concerning statistics regarding women in the arts: 1) nearly half of female participants believed that they should be further in their career; 2) a majority of women have experienced gender bias in their career pursuits; and 3) 57% cite compensation practices having a negative effect on their careers and the workplace environment.⁴ These findings from the broader artistic community align with specific trends in the choral conducting profession.

Every sector in the United States labor market has a gender disparity problem. Women comprise 48% of the entry-level workforce, but this percentage decreases as one climbs the executive ladder; only 21% of executive-level management positions are held by women.⁵ Pay remains unequal at all levels, with women earning only 82% of what their male counterparts earn.⁶

In this article, I will share interviews with twelve leading women choral and orchestral conductors from across the United States, statistics from government and nonprofit studies, literature reviews, and articles, all of which share a concerning continued disparity in both the academic and professional spheres. Almost every woman interviewed experienced discrimination or felt pigeonholed into lesser-paying careers with little room for professional advancement. Most participants recounted at least one instance in which they were told they would not be as successful as their male colleagues.

A note about definitions: The interviews reference cis-gender individuals who identify with their birth-assigned sex. The studies cited in this article rarely mention the gender identity of the participants, and the terms “male” and “female” are used as they appear in the original data. A study of equitable gender practices that include transgender and nonbinary or gender nonconforming individuals is beyond the scope of this article, but it is a gap in research that should be explored.

This study sheds light on the lack of progress the choral conducting profession has made in nurturing equitable hiring practices, pay, and work environments for women. Many of the women in this study indicated they believe there should be more mentorship opportunities for young women conductors, that graduate programs should actively seek to diversify their student bodies, and that hiring committees must be diverse in membership and actively focused on recruiting diverse candidates.

Gender equality within the conducting profession must be addressed by national leadership organizations, hiring committees, and musicians. The lack of women in leadership positions, a persistent pay gap, and anecdotal evidence from leading choral directors definitively demonstrate a pattern of gender discrimination. In order to work toward a more equitable industry, the entire music community must commit to

more open and honest discussions on gender equality, a shift in hiring procedures, a reexamination of content presented by national leadership organizations, and a commitment to stricter procedures when women come forward with concerns and allegations of gender discrimination.

Data Analysis

I approached the American Choral Directors Association (ACDA), the National Association of Schools of Music (NASM), and the College Music Society (CMS) for relevant data between September and December of 2020. I used publicly published surveys and databases from The National Collegiate Choral Organization (NCCO) and Chorus America. Despite the differences in size and mission focus, the data from CMS, Chorus America, and NCCO all show that women occupy drastically fewer choral conducting positions than men across the board, and that little progress has been made in addressing disparities. NASM data contextualizes this issue within the broader scope of academic music. ACDA was unable to provide data (for more detail on this lack of data, see page 17). After completing this survey, it came to my attention that Elisabeth Rogers Cherland analyzed many of the same original datasets from CMS and Chorus America around the same time that I was conducting my study. She concluded, just as I did, that the data shows “the pervasive inequalities between men and women choral conductors at the collegiate level,” and also notes the “lack of recent research in this area.”⁷

According to CMS in 2006, the percentage of female choral conductors within their dataset were at 32.95%, and as of 2020 that number has shrunk to 25.90% (Table 1 on the next page).⁸

Kimberly VanWeelden found similar results in 2003, with men outnumbering women teaching in post-secondary choral programs by almost three to one.⁹ When comparing CMS data gender demographics based on academic rank in 2006 and 2020, there have been modest increases (< 5%) in the number of women holding the positions of Professor and Assistant Professor, and a slightly more substantial decrease (about 11%) of women holding the rank of Associate Professor (Table 2 on page 12).¹⁰ Male domination of

academic choral leadership has seen little change in the past fourteen years.

Some of the most coveted academic choral positions are the Director of Choral Activities (or equivalent titles) at institutions that offer master's and/or doctorates in choral conducting. Sharon Hansen, former director of choral activities at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, contributed a chapter in *Wisdom, Wit, and Will: Women Choral Conductors on Their Art*, which addresses the disparities in the number of men and women holding these most desirable jobs. Hansen compiled a list of 148 institutions that offer master's and/or doctoral programs in choral conducting and determined how many were led by women. This research shows that in 2007, university choral programs offering master's degrees in choral conducting were directed by women only 15.94% of the time, and doctoral granting institutions were led by women 21.73% of the time.¹¹ I took this same list of institutions and used university faculty listings to determine who currently leads their programs. I found an increase of about 5% from 2007 to 2020 in the number of women directing master's

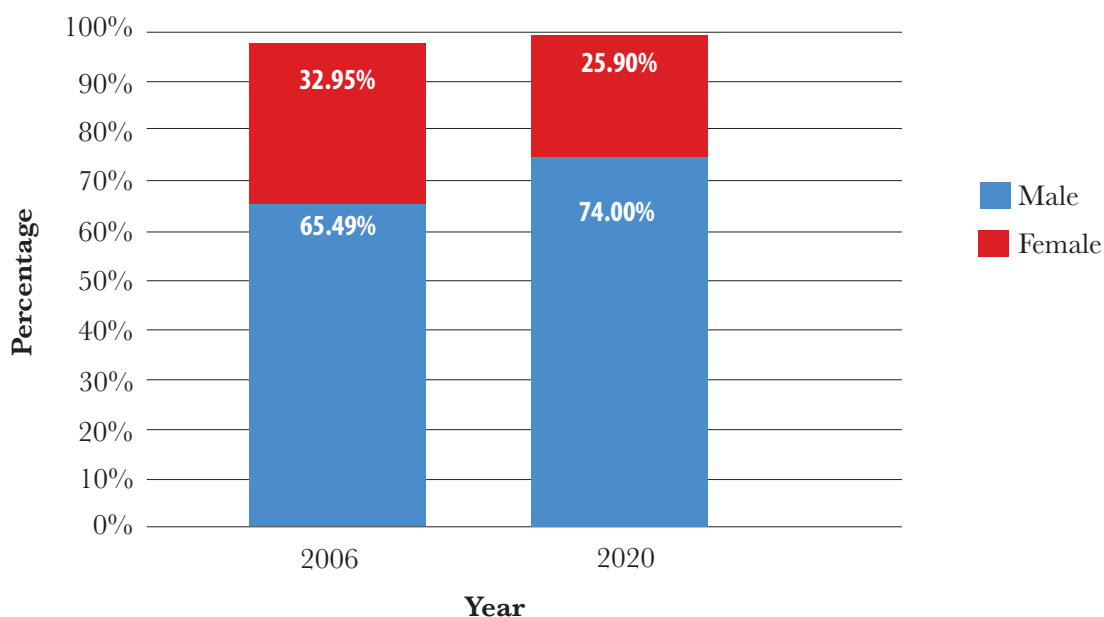
programs, and an increase of about 7% in women directing doctoral programs (Table 3 on page 12).¹² Elisabeth Cherland did a comparison to Hansen's data in 2019 by using the website www.gradmusic.org/choral-conducting to compile a list of 49 institutions that offer doctorates in choral conducting.¹³ She found that 16% were led by women.¹⁴ Our data both point to women continuing to be underrepresented at the top of the academic conducting field, and I expect the discrepancy in percentages from 2019 to 2020 are due to sample size differences.

These trends among choral academics parallel those of broader music academia, demonstrating the entrenchment of gender discrimination in both choral and general music academic spheres. The percentage of women in top choral conducting positions is similar to the percentage of women who are full professors in all academic music (Tables 4 and 5 on page 13).¹⁵

The graphs represent a meager increase in the percentage of women holding Professor positions of 2.1% from 2010 to 2020.¹⁶ Further, data demonstrate a clear trend that as rank ascends, the percentage of women

Table 1

Reported Genders of Academic Choral Conductors, 2006 and 2020 (College Music Society)



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Table 2

Gender and Rank in Academic Choral Music, 2006 and 2020 (College Music Society)

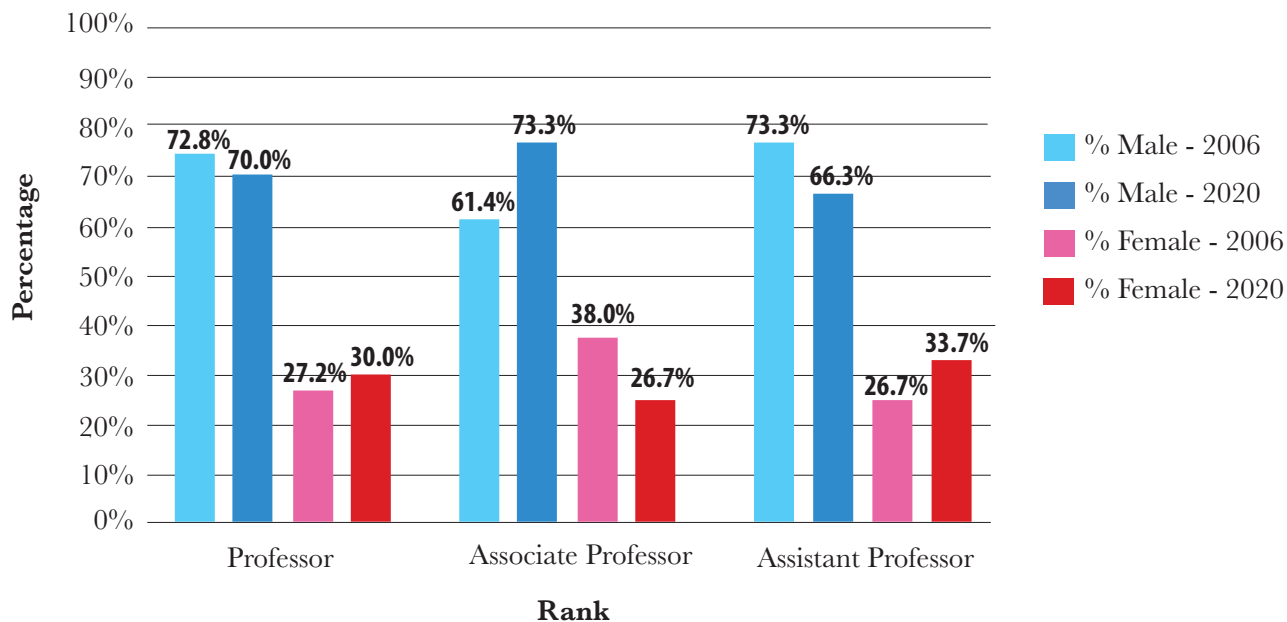


Table 3

Gender Within Director of Choral Activities Position, 2007 and 2020 (Data Provided in Part by Sharon Hansen)

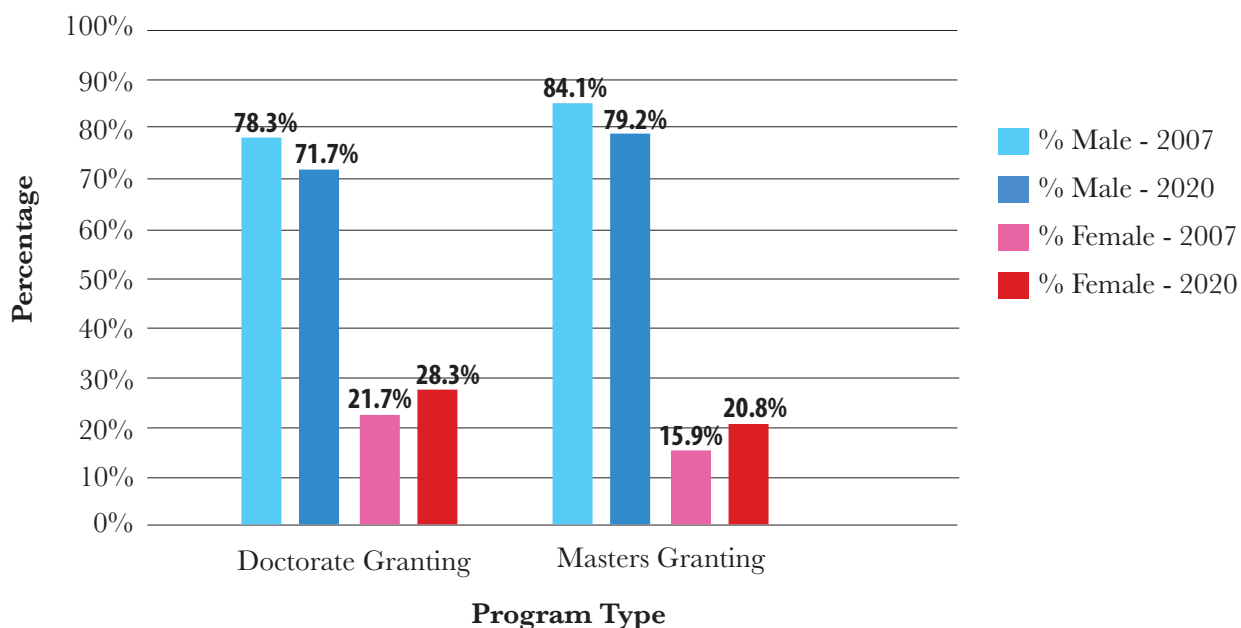


Table 4

Gender and Rank in Academic Music, 2010-2011 (National Association of Schools of Music)

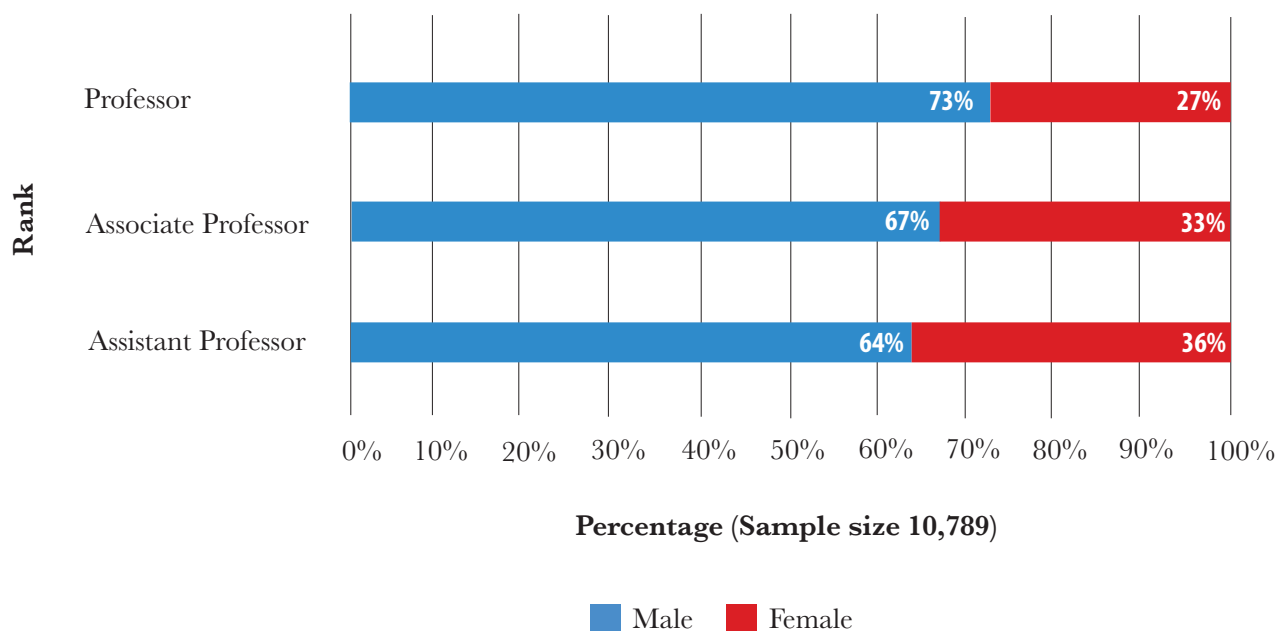
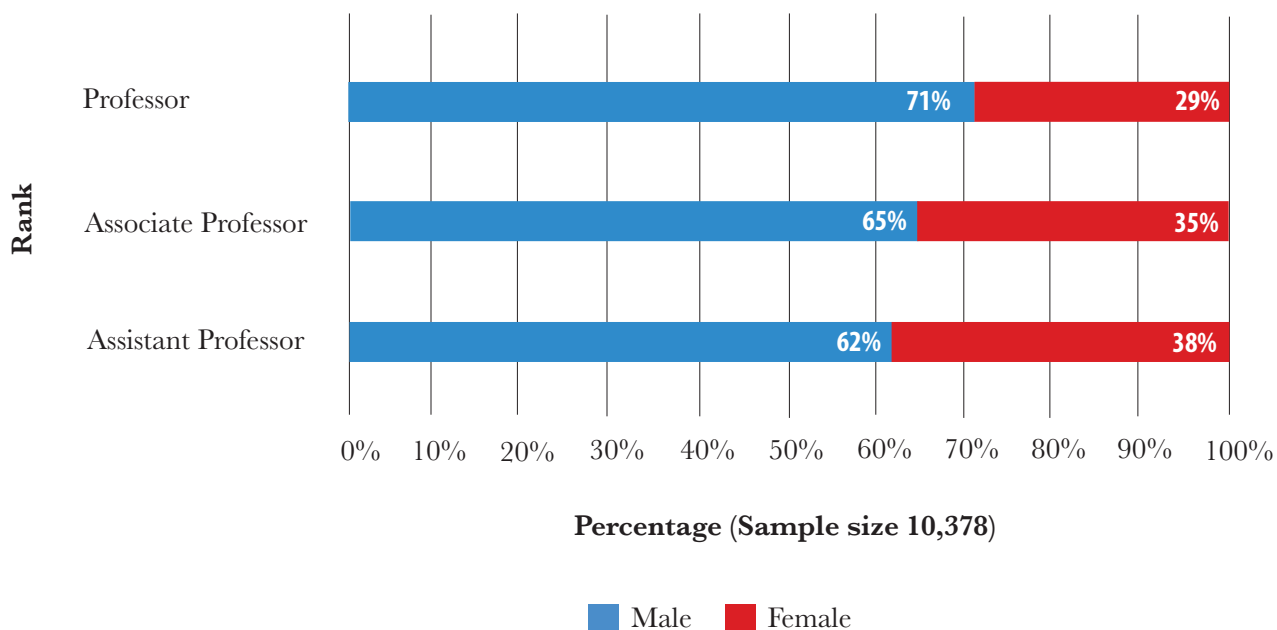


Table 5

Gender and Rank in Academic Music, 2019-2020 (National Association of Schools of Music)



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occupying these positions decreases.¹⁷ It should be noted that these gender gaps are not persistent in music student demographics. Roughly an equal percentage of men and women pursue degrees in music at the undergraduate and graduate levels, yet men hold the vast majority of teaching positions.¹⁸ Cherland found similar results in the 2016-2017 school year, and noted that “there remains a significant gap between the number of qualified women candidates and the number of women faculty.”¹⁹

Gender disparities in choral conducting go beyond just the academic sphere. Chorus America conducted surveys in 2005 and 2017 that address gender demographics as they relate to pay and job title within the academic, community, and professional choir spheres. The surveys show that in 2017, 58% of respondents were male (2.8% less than 2005).²⁰ While at first glance this seems to show a marginal increase in women conductors, we find that when broken down by number of choirs directed by gender (rather than number of respondents), the number of women led ensembles has decreased by around 5%.²¹ According to the Chorus America surveys, women directed only 16% of surveyed professional choruses in 2017.²² Conversely, men direct only 29% of surveyed children’s ensembles.²³ NCCO published a similar survey in 2021 that found that 66.5% of respondents identified as male, 28.6% as female, .5% as gender queer/gender fluid/non-binary, 3.3% preferred not to say, and 2 individuals self-described.²⁴

Chorus America surveys confirm that women are paid on average only 74% of what their male colleagues are compensated, a figure that has not changed since the 2005 survey.²⁵ To put this statistic in perspective, the wage gap between men and women in the broader U.S. economy is at 82%, a full 8% closer to equality than what we see in the choral conducting profession.²⁶ Further, the wage gap persists no matter the degree earned or type of choir conducted.²⁷

In addition to the surveys from 2005 and 2017, Chorus America keeps a database of individual membership, choral organizations, and affiliated businesses as well as their operating budgets. According to the database there are 35 professional, volunteer, and children’s choirs with budgets over \$1,000,000.²⁸ Of these ensembles, 80% are directed by men and 20% by wom-

en. Of these 35 choirs, 12 are children’s ensembles, of which 58.3% are directed by men, and 41.67% by women. The remaining 23 adult volunteer and professional ensembles are directed by men 91.3% of the time and women 8.7%. Eight of the ensembles in the database are professional ensembles, 100% of which are directed by men.

The data from CMS, NCCO, Chorus America, and independent publications provided in the study demonstrate that women are continually underrepresented in academic, community-based, and professional choral settings. The Chorus America database and data from Sharon Hansen reveal that women are especially underrepresented within the top tiers of both academic and professional choral settings. Overwhelmingly, the percentage of women conductors has decreased in the past decade and a half, and there has been no positive movement toward wage equity. The data all point to persistent gender inequity in the choral conducting profession that has not been adequately addressed in any meaningful way.

Examining the Interviews

While existing datasets are a valuable tool in determining the state of gender equity, I felt that it was important to also gather personal perspectives from women currently in the field. I approached 19 women at the top of the conducting field, and 12 of them agreed to interviews. These participants are Dr. Betsy Cook Weber, Dr. Marie Bucoy-Calavan, Dr. Erin Colwitz, Dr. Coreen Duffy, Robyn Lana, Dr. Iris Levine, Dr. Marcela Molina, Dr. Amanda Quist, Dr. Zanaida Stewart Robles, Professor Kathy Saltzman Romey, Dr. Beth Willer, and Dr. Jenny Wong. All quotes and anecdotes in this section come from these 12 women. In order to retain a level of privacy and allow them to speak freely, their quotes and anecdotes will remain anonymous.

This group of interviewees identify as women, and come from a diverse array of racial, educational, and professional backgrounds. This sample includes directors of community, professional, collegiate, and children’s choirs. The women I interviewed have collectively earned degrees from 21 different institutions, and teach in nine different states across the United States. Not only is this sample of directors diverse in terms of

backgrounds, but these women are also all considered to be experts in their field.

Every interviewee had positive things to say about their peers and/or mentors when going through their studies. When asked about relationships with their male colleagues during school, there was a resounding agreement that they generally felt seen and heard by their peers on an equal level with the men. When asked about mentors, most of the interviewees listed previous teachers from their masters or doctorate programs. One woman spoke of a past mentor's involvement in her job search, stating, "he has been the most incredible mentor through that whole process. I don't think I could have done it without him."²⁹

Despite these positive experiences with most peers and teachers, many of the women I interviewed noted that it was during their master's and doctorate programs that they first noticed hints of the future discrimination they would be facing in their careers. One woman reflected:

During my master's degree, and even into my doctorate, I was resistant to the idea that my gender would affect me professionally... until I started to have experiences where implicit bias negatively impacted my opportunities and learning. In one graduate conducting seminar I was the only woman among several men... I had less podium time; my opinions regarding analysis were dismissed; my contributions to conversations about our recent conducting experiences were cut short, or I was skipped altogether as we went around the room; if my interpretation didn't align with the professor's opinion, it wasn't accepted in the way that my male colleagues' opinions were accepted. I had to come to terms with the reality that I might not always be on a level playing field with my male colleagues.³⁰

This woman wasn't alone in her realization. Another interviewee recalled that during her master's program, "I would often participate in seminar discussions and receive little reaction or affirmation, only to

have a male colleague say something very similar a few minutes later to an enthusiastic response...and I would think, didn't I just say that?"³¹ Another woman remembered being at the top of her class but noticing that she wasn't receiving the same opportunities as her male colleagues.³²

During her graduate studies, one of these individuals realized that many women in the profession are pressured to embrace children's choir positions. Her school had booked a children's choir conducting workshop and "the female colleagues were encouraged to go to this children's choir conducting master class...but none of the males [were]."³³ Multiple women interviewed for this research perceived an expectation that they would fall into children's or women's choir positions. Chorus America data discussed previously in this article corroborate this anecdotal evidence. Despite this expectation, some interviewees recounted following the path of conducting school-aged choirs and receiving judgement for what others perceived as a waste of a doctorate degree.

Many of these women began to notice that even if they received equal treatment from their professors, "women weren't represented in [their] studies," meaning most of the academic content focused on male composers, conductors, and performers.³⁴ For some, studying primarily with men was not an issue, but for others, "[they] finally got to study with a woman for the first time in [their] life, and that made every difference in the world."³⁵ Those who never had the opportunity to study with a woman were left asking, "I wonder what my career would have been like, what my grad school experience would have been like, if I had a woman mentor, a woman teacher to whom I could actually approach and ask certain things that I wouldn't ask my male colleagues or my male mentors."³⁶

Seventy-five percent of the women interviewed felt that—while it is difficult to know the real reason—they had been passed up for at least one job due to their gender. One additional woman specified that while she was unsure if she had lost a job due to gender, she believes gender "plays a role in some of the opportunities that I've been exposed to and had a chance to take advantage of."³⁷

In the case of one interviewee, someone on the hiring committee for a position disclosed they heard the com-

mittee chair say, “Well, we’ve had a woman for a long time in this position. I think it’s time we hire a man.”³⁸ Another interviewee had been told she was favored for the position she was interviewing for, but she “just blew it” by mentioning her newborn baby.³⁹ She “saw [that] the whole tenor of the room shifted, and there was like this gasp and silence,” followed by questions about childcare and her family life, which are illegal under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.⁴⁰ Another woman learned that the chair of a hiring committee had decided not to hire her because she was pregnant.⁴¹ Incidents like this create an unspoken understanding in the choral world that having children—or potentially having children—impedes women in their careers.⁴²

While incidents like these are the most blatantly discriminatory, less obvious examples sow seeds of doubt in the minds of talented women. When a woman “makes it to the final round” in multiple job searches in the same geographic area and “in each case they chose a white male,” that candidate begins to wonder what went wrong.⁴³ One woman was overlooked as a possible candidate for a collegiate position she “had been assisting with for an entire year.” She shared that she “had a terminal degree in choral conducting and was only moved into the pool of candidates when the students came forward and told the college to consider her application.” She ultimately won the position but was curious why the college did not initially view her as a viable candidate.⁴⁴

When a woman does receive an interview or a position, colleagues will sometimes meet her with hostility and doubt about how she earned the spot. One woman recounted being picked for an interview over a male colleague. He responded to this news by saying that the female candidate, who also happened to be a woman of color, “checked all the boxes,” deeming her success as a diversity initiative rather than based on her talents.⁴⁵ Another woman recalled a male colleague’s response to her position becoming tenure track. He called her a “diversity hire” and said that “[his] institution did that for an African American gentleman a few years back.”⁴⁶ Moments like these stick with individuals and become “an insecurity that he planted, and it festers. The only reason I would get an interview for things...is because I’m a minority or I’m a woman.”⁴⁷ These moments make women question, “is this because of my gender

or because I’m just not good at what I’m doing?”⁴⁸

Once women have won positions, the struggle to be seen as equal does not stop. One interviewee recounted the struggle to get her students to call her by her honorific in accordance with all the men in the department.⁴⁹ Another pointed out that the rest of her male colleagues from her doctoral program had “surpassed [her]... they’re all teaching at these giant schools with these giant programs with graduate programs.”⁵⁰ She had “come to terms” with the idea that her male colleagues were more easily working their way up in the choral world and claiming the spotlight.⁵¹

Women are also fighting to receive equitable pay. Eighty-three percent of the women I interviewed for this study perceived a pay-gap between them and their male colleagues. One interviewee detailed her fight for equal pay, stating, “I insist on being not just fairly compensated, but I insist on being generously compensated... The voices of the marginalized are finally wanting to be heard...my value has gone up.”⁵² Another woman recounted that when she mentors other women, she tells them, “don’t give away your gift, don’t give away your skill set...don’t give away your time.”⁵³ The statistics on pay from Chorus America discussed previously in this article highlight how important but onerous it is for women to insist on being compensated equally.

What is perhaps most disappointing are the moments of blatant gender-driven language pointed at professional women. One interviewee told me about a time when she “walked off the podium after finishing a rehearsal, [a] patron said to me ‘I love the way you wiggle your butt when you conduct.’ I was so pissed off, I couldn’t breathe.”⁵⁴ A second woman had a “very jarring conversation” with a mentor about her pantsuit “accentuating [her] assets.”⁵⁵ Another woman recounted a student “going around calling [her] a b****.”⁵⁶ To get the behavior to stop she had to approach her department head and point out the “sexual undertones” implied by that language and insist on intervention.⁵⁷ Yet another woman recounted being at a university and having her professor and male peers suggest using her appearance to attract more men to the department.⁵⁸ Professional environments should be immune from this kind of inappropriate language, but its continued use demonstrates the lack of respect granted to women in positions of power.

While being a woman in this profession brings chal-

lenges, many of the women interviewed reflected on the more joyful moments of their careers. They all acknowledged the unique vision a woman can bring to the podium. One interviewee noted that “those who identify as women tend to be comfortable with being graceful” and that she feels comfortable in connecting with her singers through facial expression.⁵⁹ Another noted “the permission by society to be more compassionate. Women are often more accepted showing compassion and emotion than men.”⁶⁰ Although having a family can impede a woman’s ability to advance in her career, one interviewee remembered conducting the Fauré *Requiem* two days before she gave birth to her first child, and how “powerful that was for both the performers and audience to see a very pregnant woman on the podium, who was so resolute, committed, and engaged in her craft.”⁶¹

The choral conducting profession has come a long way, but it seems to have plateaued in terms of gender equity over the past decade and a half. Devising a way to continue to move forward is integral to fostering a safe and welcoming environment for everyone. One woman I interviewed said, “I certainly never want to be a token. I want to be hired because of my skills, commitment, and integrity. Not my gender identity.”⁶² Through my interviews, many of these women offered thoughtful solutions to the problem. Such solutions include: 1) “Institutions that are teaching young people to conduct, or to lead artistically, must seek out and recruit the most diverse pool of students that they can—in terms of race, gender, ethnicity, socio-economic status, and ability... and that work must be an active pursuit and a thoughtful pursuit, not one that we can expect to happen without our intentional and tireless action”⁶³; 2) “The hiring process in higher education needs to do a better job of encouraging women to apply for positions”⁶⁴; 3) “Summer experiences or workshops...need to feature more women and people of color so that anybody, any student, gets to just study with more conductors...the more people you have to learn from, the more [people] you have to look up to the better informed we’ll all be”⁶⁵; 4) more diverse search committees,⁶⁶ and 5) “In the past what has hurt us is that we haven’t known each other and we haven’t known about each other’s experience...it’s become imperative that we’ve made space to listen...I don’t think we can ever go back to not listening

to each other’s stories.”⁶⁷

Three of the twelve women I interviewed specifically spoke about the role the American Choral Director’s Association has played in perpetuating gender inequity. One stated that “probably the most gender inequality that I have witnessed has been through ACDA...I do mean that on a national level.”⁶⁸ A specific example is that “when women are asked to do [honor choirs], they are asked to conduct children’s choirs or they are asked to conduct women’s choirs.”⁶⁹ One interviewee said that “while ACDA has made more of an effort to have women on the podium, there are times one still feels like the token woman.”⁷⁰ Historically, ACDA has invited more men to conduct their choirs and honor choirs at conferences, which has not gone unnoticed by the broader choral community. According to Cherland, in 2019 only 31% of the conductors that performed at the conference were women.⁷¹ Considering the vast inequity of the number of women conducting choirs on a national level, it is important to recognize that the number of women invited to conduct at conferences is a reflection of broader national trends. This raises the question of whether the choral community expects national organizations to be an instrument and catalyst for positive change, or a reflection of current trends. Recently, ACDA has appeared to be making some positive steps toward rectifying some inequities. Many interest sessions have been presented through a lens of equity, and I have been told that conversations about bettering our field for women have begun at the top levels.

The availability of data through national organizations regarding gender demographics is severely lacking. In my own attempts to gather data for this paper, I was unable to find any articles in ACDA’s publications regarding gender demographics in conducting. When I reached out to ACDA for demographic information in December of 2020, they were unable to provide me with data. In communications with ACDA in May of 2022, I learned that the organization has become more deliberate in their data collection since 2021. Still, participation in demographic surveys is very low and skews heavily toward younger members, and it would not be responsible to include the corresponding data, as it is incomplete as of now.

Access to some of Chorus America’s studies were contingent upon being a paid member of the organiza-

tion. Access to CMS data was available through direct inquiry via email with their national offices. NCCO and NASM are the two organizations that offer free access to their data through their websites. Interviewees indicated that stronger leadership from national organizations on combatting gender inequity is necessary.

Encouragement

Every woman interviewed for this article offered practical encouragement to other women entering the choral conducting profession:

- Seek out women mentors.⁷²
- Seek community support.⁷³
- You don't have to justify yourself...you don't have to walk in and say I'm a female conductor...you don't have to hide it.⁷⁴
- Never wait for someone to give you permission; if there's something you want to do in the field, something you want to learn...something you want to become an expert in...just go for it—make it happen. You may be the only one who can see the need.⁷⁵
- Prepare, prepare, prepare, learn as much as you possibly can. Network as much as you possibly can.⁷⁶
- Work hard, be kind, network like crazy. Do a good job wherever you land, but then don't be satisfied. Keep looking for the next opportunity.⁷⁷
- Be strong, be bold, go out, follow your dreams; understand what it is that you want and don't ever be afraid of it.⁷⁸
- The resilience and tenacity in connecting to your craft and pursuing your passion is often as critical as the gifts of talent and skill themselves.⁷⁹
- Don't let being a woman scare you; there's actually a lot of power in being a woman.⁸⁰

- It's important to listen to your instincts and to trust them... it's important to find places where you can grow and where you sense that the people around you support you. Sometimes if a door opens, it's a good sign that it's worth going through."⁸¹

- Concentrate on making your skills top notch.⁸²

Recommendations

Rectifying the gender inequities in the choral conducting profession should start with our national organizations. Chorus America provides an excellent model for collecting and publishing data on gender as it relates to job title and pay. Much of their data is available to non-members, and I would urge them to go a step further and make all demographic data publicly available to non-members. Other organizations should be regularly collecting demographic data from their members and publishing their findings both as raw data and in journal publications.

National organizations should be providing opportunities at regional and national conventions for discussion on gender inequity. Oftentimes conferences are dedicated to reading sessions, teaching methods, and how to make a more inclusive environment for our singers. While our community has done incredible work in making the learning environment more welcoming to our students, the inequities amongst our leaders have gone unaddressed. Allowing for women-led sessions on creating a more inclusive environment for marginalized members of our own teaching community are integral to future progress. It is important for students to see themselves reflected in those who teach and lead them.

Bias training, such as the Chorus America ADEI Learning Lab, needs to be implemented to counteract inequities in hiring, promotions, and pay. Shelley Correll, director of the Clayman Institute for Gender Research, found that some progress was made through a "small wins model" that helps companies identify places in the hiring and evaluation processes that gender bias is present.⁸³ This model advocates for "unconscious bias training and formalizing methods for hiring and evaluating employees so that they are based on achievement-related criteria."⁸⁴

The Society for Human Resources Management ad-

vocates for a series of audits within an organization to identify where hiring and pay gaps are present, followed by an analysis of why these disparities might be happening, alteration of the identified issue, followed by more audits to track the success of the initiatives.⁸⁵ Both of these organizations have seen tangible change in hiring practices and pay disparities through execution of these intentional methods. Choral organizations at every level should implement more stringent hiring procedures and actively work toward anti-discriminatory practices.

Organizations must create an environment in which women feel safe coming forward with concerns. Fear of not being taken seriously or retribution when reporting harassment or discrimination is problematic for many women in the field. The choral world is one where connections are invaluable and speaking up can be perilous for professional advancement. National organizations and employers must create formal systems for complaints and concerns that provide their members and employees confidential avenues for concerns to be taken seriously.

Conclusion

The glass ceiling has yet to be shattered for women in the choral conducting profession. While great strides have been made for women on the podium, quantitative data and anecdotal evidence clearly show that movement toward equity have been at a standstill for the past decade and a half. The first step in positive progress is acknowledgement and discussion by leading national organizations. Frequent studies on gender demographics as they relate to job title, work environment, pay, and education are vital in this endeavor. Most currently available information aside from this paper is out of date or inaccessible.

In addition to data and scientific studies, “if we are to approach a world where we embrace equity and equality with commitment and compassion, we must start with the recognition of actual people and experiences...”⁸⁶ Women, such as those who participated in the survey discussed above, should be at the center of this discussion. The issue of gender inequity goes beyond the data and permeates the daily lives of many women. Offering them a platform at conventions and in publications without creating a sense of tokenism is imperative for

moving forward.

Continued progress is necessary not only for the advancement of women, but also for the evolution of music in general. Individuals across the gender spectrum bring different perspectives, strengths, and life experiences to their craft, which then inform their musical decisions. These decisions create expressive diversity that helps to propel progress and invention in choral music. To limit leadership positions to primarily one gender, even subconsciously, is to hinder expressive innovation for the entire music community. **□**

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